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A Study of Theatrical Entertainments in Northwest Arkansas From Their Beginning Through 1889.

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A STUDY OF THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS
IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS FROM THEIR
BEGINNING THROUGH 1889.

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A STUDY OF THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS
FROM THEIR BEGINNING THROUGH 1889

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech

by
Harold Calvin Tedford
B.A., Ouachita College, 1954
M.A., University of Arkansas, 1958
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ABSTRACT

The theatrical records of the population centers of the frontier have often come to be thought of as the total history of the frontier theatre. Thus, in the study of American theatre history, the tendency is to ignore those less populated regions and to concentrate on the more active and important theatre centers. This practice has left a void in the recorded history of the nineteenth century American theatre.

The broad general purpose of this study is to discover and to record all phases of theatrical entertainment for the northwest quarter of Arkansas from its frontier beginnings through the year 1889. Fort Smith, Van Buren, Fayetteville, Russellville, and Dardanelle are the towns in the region for which the most complete information of theatrical activities for this period remains. Other towns are covered when information permits. The specific entertainments discussed are: professional dramatic companies; amateur dramatic performances; circuses; amusements such as medicine shows, panoramas, lectures, tableaux, magicians and musical variety shows; and Negro minstrels.

From the first settlements in the early 1800's to the Civil War, northwest Arkansas was not only a geographical, but also a theatrical frontier. The earliest theatrical amusement which appeared in the region was W. Waterman's Circus in 1838. Seven other circuses toured

the region before the Civil War. The earliest minstrel troupe visited the region in 1845. The amateur dramatic activity began in the early 1840's but the efforts of these groups, while a vital part of the cultural beginnings, were not extensive before the war. An occasional lecturer, one magician, a panorama, and other scattered events comprised the general amusements before 1865. From 1840 to 1862 northwest Arkansas was visited by nine professional theatrical companies. The most active period was during the late 1850's and early 1860's when Nick Moroney's theatre was operating in Fort Smith and vicinity.

The significant aspect of this pre-war period is that the theatrical entertainments were successful attempts to introduce to the frontier the institutions of civilization which the new settlers had left in the East. Such entertainments were generally welcomed by the citizens.

Following the Civil War there was a gradual increase in all forms of theatrical activity. The completion of the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad in the 1870's made the region more accessible to traveling shows. Thirty circuses visited the region before 1890 including the shows of Dan Rice, W. W. Cole, Van Amburgh, and Barnum and Bailey. Amateur groups were active in the towns of the region, especially during the 1870's. Professional minstrel shows increased as did the various forms of variety entertainment. The professional dramatic companies were rare before the completion of the railroad but this had changed by 1880. The greatest period of growth for

professional dramatic companies was in the 1880's when Fort Smith was visited by such popular stars as Jefferson, Keene, O'Neil, Janauschek, Warde, James and Wainwright.

Northwest Arkansas was not important as a theatre center when compared to the eastern cities. Nonetheless the development of theatrical entertainments in a region such as this is significant in that it shows that the citizens found the theatre and theatrical entertainments a necessary part of their lives. Theatrical development in the region not only reflected the desire of the citizens for contact with the culture and traditions of the eastern part of the United States, but also reflected the need which the theatre satisfied in the everyday life of the communities and the citizens.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American frontier which moved west from the Alleghany Mountains during the nineteenth century dominated the first century of American independence.¹ The attraction of land in almost unlimited amounts drew the great flood of settlers who moved west to begin new lives in the wilderness.² Among those courageous people who settled the vast spaces of the continent were many young men who "carried with them a love for the drama both in book form and on the stage, and doubtless many who had actually participated in amateur performances in their native cities."³ Because of this interest, amateur performances often became a part of the life of the early settlements, and the professional theatre began to penetrate the frontier in the second decade of the nineteenth century.⁴

The growth of theatrical enterprises in all of the new

¹Frederic L. Paxson, History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), p. 300.

²Ibid., p. 186.

³William G. B. Carson, The Theatre on the Frontier; The Early Years of the St. Louis Stage (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 2.

⁴Glenn Hughes, A History of The American Theatre, 1700-1950 (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 123.

territory followed much the same pattern. First, a small traveling company would move from one settlement to another where it would play in any available space, such as a warehouse, a hotel dining room, or any other area large enough to hold a paying audience. When possible, these traveling troupes "built" the first theatres. These were sometimes on the second floor of a store building and ordinarily consisted of a remodeled space rather than a specially constructed building. The next step in the development came some years later when the temporary areas were replaced by permanent buildings especially intended to be theatres. These were usually financed by popular subscription.⁵

I. THE PROBLEM

Development such as that described above was found in the theatres of St. Louis, Louisville, Memphis, and other frontier towns. But the majority of the new settlers on the frontier did not stop for long in the rapidly growing towns. They moved on to settle the rich farm lands of the river valleys and established small towns where they traded.⁶

The theatrical records of the population centers of the frontier have often come to be thought of as the total history of the frontier theatre. Thus, in the study of American theatre history, the

⁵Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U. S. A., 1668-1957. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 91.

⁶Ray A. Billington, Westward Expansion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), pp. 467-468.

tendency is to ignore those less populated regions and to concentrate on the more active and important theatre centers. This practice has left a void in the recorded history of the theatre on the frontier, as well as the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

II. THE PURPOSE

The broad general purpose of this study is to discover and to record all phases of theatrical entertainment for the northwest quarter of Arkansas from its frontier beginnings through the year 1889. The specific purposes are as follows:

1. To establish the names and dates of the first professional companies who made their appearance in this section of the state.
2. To present the development of the professional dramatic entertainment from the early days of the Arkansas frontier through the year 1889.
3. To determine to what extent the people of the region themselves participated in amateur theatricals when no professional entertainment was available.
4. To chronicle the performances of the traveling circuses in the region.
5. To discover what other theatrical entertainments were available to the audiences in this region, i.e., showboats, medicine shows, panoramas, lectures, tableaux, professional musical variety shows, Negro minstrels, etc. (Amateur musical events such as concerts or vocal recitals performed by local talent are not included unless relative to a theatrical event.)
6. To record for reference the plays performed by professional companies, the names of the companies performing them and the dates of performance. To present through four appendixes the calendar of professional entertainments which appeared before 1889.

III. THE JUSTIFICATION

The study of the theatre in a particular region can offer a basis for generalizations concerning the support which the people gave the theatre, their taste in theatrical performances, their attitudes toward culture, their social life, and their everyday existence. Constance Rourke, in her essay, "The Roots of American Culture," says:

In a nascent culture such as ours, peaks of achievement have occurred and must have their place, but if our concern is with the whole dimensional pattern, minor figures may also become symbols of a dominant creative effort. Not merely the individual but the culture of a group, a town, a region may be significant of main tendencies.⁷

In a region that was relatively isolated from the mainstream of professional theatre, it is not surprising that many types of theatrical entertainments filled the leisure time of the people. The circuses, medicine shows, magicians, lectures, showboats, amateur productions of plays by local people, Negro minstrels, and various other entertainments presented in a theatrical setting served to lighten the free hours of the frontier towns. These entertainments are frequently neglected by the theatrical historian when covering theatre in a region. Nonetheless they are representative of what the isolated frontier audience had for entertainment.

There is no basis for comparing the performance of a group of amateurs in Van Buren, Arkansas, during the 1840's with the polished

⁷Constance M. Rourke, The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 51.

performances of the well trained actors in the elegant theatres of New Orleans. The two are very different types of theatre. However, the Van Buren performance drew an audience and satisfied a need for entertainment. It was certainly not without influence in the town, for it was an effort toward a more civilized way of life. A group of amateurs in a small Arkansas river settlement was representative of what was happening at many other communities during the frontier period, where the "better element"

. . . tried to reproduce in the new environment the civilized way of life they had previously known. Some times this better element was a minority, but a potent minority who, if they lost an occasional battle, usually managed in some fashion to win the war against the powers of darkness.⁸

IV. THE LITERATURE

As early as 1833 William Dunlap wrote in his history of the American stage: "The recent purchase of Louisiana, and settlement of the great valley of the Mississippi, will make theatre of this vast and populous region a subject for a subsequent work. . . ."⁹ This contention has been supported by such works as those of William G. B. Carson on the early St. Louis theatre,¹⁰ John S. Kendall on the New

⁸Louis B. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 12.

⁹William Dunlap, History of the American Theatre (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), Vol. II, p. 304.

¹⁰Carson, op. cit.; and Managers in Distress, The St. Louis Stage, 1840-1844 (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1949).

Orleans stage,¹¹ Joseph S. Schick on the early theatre in Eastern Iowa,¹² and Elbert R. Bowen's work on early theatrical entertainment in rural Missouri.¹³ Carson's bibliographical essay on the frontier theatre which appeared in Theatre Research in 1958 is a valuable guide to published books on the subject.¹⁴ Other works have been published in articles in magazines, journals, and newspapers. In addition to the published works, considerable material has been presented in numerous doctoral dissertations and master's theses.¹⁵ But many spaces still must be filled if a thorough study of the theatre in this period of American history, is to be made.

In the state of Arkansas, some studies of the development of the theatre in the capital city of Little Rock have been completed. An unpublished thesis written by Denham Lee Wooten at Columbia University in 1935 attempts to give the annals of the professional stage in Little Rock from 1834 to 1890.¹⁶ This was subsequently edited and published

¹¹John S. Kendall, The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952).

¹²Joseph S. Schick, The Early Theater in Eastern Iowa; Cultural Beginnings and the Rise of the Theater in Davenport and Eastern Iowa (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939).

¹³Elbert R. Bowen, Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War (University of Missouri Studies, Vol. XXXII. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1959).

¹⁴Carson, "The Theatre of the American Frontier, A Bibliographical Essay," Theatre Research, I (March 1958), pp. 14-23.

¹⁵Clifford E. Hamar, "American Theatre History: A Geographical Index," Educational Theatre Journal, I (1949), pp. 164-94.

¹⁶Denham Lee Wooten, "Annals of the Stage in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1834-1890" (unpublished Master's thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1935).

in the Arkansas Gazette Sunday Magazine in the late fall of 1935.¹⁷ The American Guide Series' Arkansas: A Guide to the State presents a four page account of the history of the theatre in Arkansas.¹⁸ This is a very brief study and is concerned primarily with Little Rock. Charles E. Reed, Jr. completed a thesis at the University of Florida in 1949 entitled "An Historical Study of Professional Dramatic Entertainment in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1889-1899."¹⁹ An article by Walter Moffatt in the Winter, 1953, issue of the Arkansas Historical Quarterly briefly charts the earliest known theatrical activities in Arkansas.²⁰ The most recent article on the professional theatre is by D. Allen Stokes, and is entitled "The First Theatrical Season in Arkansas: Little Rock, 1838-1839."²¹

In addition to the studies of the professional theatre, two other articles of interest have been published. The circuses and

¹⁷Wooten, "The History of the Theater in Arkansas," Arkansas Gazette Sunday Magazine, November 17 through December 22, 1935.

¹⁸Arkansas: A Guide to the State (in American Guide Series, New York: Hastings House, 1941), pp. 115-118.

¹⁹Charles E. Reed, Jr., "An Historical Study of Professional Dramatic Entertainment in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1889-1899" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1949).

²⁰Walter Moffatt, "The First Theatrical Activities in Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XII (Winter, 1953), pp. 327-32.

²¹D. Allen Stokes, "The First Theatrical Season in Arkansas: Little Rock, 1838-1839," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXIII (Summer, 1964), pp. 166-183.

showboats in eastern Arkansas were discussed in three articles by S. D. Dickinson in the Arkansas Gazette in the fall of 1948.²² Plays written in Arkansas before World War I are the subject of an article in the Arkansas Historical Quarterly written by Paul T. Nolan and Amos E. Simpson.²³

The above list of articles and theses constitutes the literature pertaining specifically to early theatrical history in Arkansas.

V. REGIONAL LIMITATIONS

In an effort to limit the study to a region with a cultural unity, the northwest section of Arkansas was selected. This region encompasses the following counties: Benton, Carroll, Crawford, Franklin, Johnson, Logan, Madison, Newton, Pope, Sebastian, Washington, and Yell. The principal towns included in the area are: Bentonville and Rogers in Benton County; Berryville and Eureka Springs in Carroll County; Van Buren and Alma in Crawford County; Ozark in Franklin County; Clarksville in Johnson County; Booneville and Paris in Logan County; Huntsville in Madison County; Jasper in Newton County; Russellville in Pope County; Fort Smith and Greenwood in Sebastian County; Fayetteville and Springdale in Washington County; Dardanelle in Yell

²²S. D. Dickinson, "Showboats and Circuses," Arkansas Gazette, November 11, December 5 and 12, 1948.

²³Paul T. Nolan and Amos E. Simpson, "Arkansas Drama Before World War I: An Unexplored Country," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXII (Spring, 1963), pp. 61-75.

County. All of the counties except Benton, Carroll, Madison, Newton and Washington touch the Arkansas River. The cities of Fort Smith, Van Buren, Ozark, and Dardanelle are located directly on the river, and, during the years before the railroads, they were all important port towns. Most of the counties were served by railroads before 1890.²⁴ Because of the absence of newspaper files and other primary source materials, Logan, Carroll, Madison, and Newton Counties will be covered by the study only when extant material permits.

VI. SOURCES

The primary sources for this study consist of contemporary newspaper accounts. The other sources include books, pamphlets, programs, and other miscellany.

Newspapers

The material for this study, for the greater part, has been gathered from the files of those newspapers which were published prior to 1890 within the region of northwest Arkansas. The majority of the papers were published only weekly and most of the copy in them was the work of a single editor. Fort Smith did have several dailies, but only a few months of these are still extant. Some of the editors were interested in the theatre and gave good coverage to all theatrical events. Others showed preference for only those shows which bought

²⁴David Y. Thomas (ed.), Arkansas and Its People (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), Vol. II, pp. 424-435, passim.

advertising space or had hand bills printed on their presses and paid their bills. The lack of comment in some of the papers can be attributed to several factors. Sometimes the events of the week did not seem worth printing in the issue of the paper the following week. Often mention of a theatrical event was made only when some other "news" happened in connection with it. Also, the editors, as a rule, did not qualify as critics and were frequently hesitant to express an opinion.

Rarely did the papers print extensive information about theatrical events. The events which got the most coverage were the local amateur productions and seldom did the editors express any adverse criticism of them. Most of the adverse criticism was directed toward the circuses which took too much money, the editors argued, from the local trade area. It seems safe to say that most editors were not very objective, and what they wrote cannot always be taken at face value.

In spite of these inconsistencies, the combined files of all of the papers proved to contain an abundance of lively material pertaining to the theatre. The cities with the most complete newspaper files are Fort Smith, Van Buren, Fayetteville, and Russellville. The city of Fort Smith supplied more newspapers than the other towns, with several good runs of files still extant. Newspapers from the town of Dardanelle are available for several years in the 1870's and 1880's but no complete run is extant. There are only a few single issues of papers extant for Clarksville; none are available for Alma and Ozark.

Issues of a year or so are available for both Springdale and Bentonville.²⁵ Those towns where no paper is available are often mentioned in the papers of the other towns of the region. The files of the Little Rock papers were very useful because they carried state as well as local news. The newspaper collections of the University of Arkansas, the Arkansas History Commission, and the University of Texas contain the main holdings of extant northwest Arkansas papers for the period.

Other Materials

Other sources have been books dealing with the history of Arkansas and the northwest region of the state and various pamphlets concerning the region. Theatrical memoirs of performers of the period were read but disclosed little information concerning northwest Arkansas. No letters or diaries were found which contained any reference to theatrical entertainments. Several interviews were conducted, but little was uncovered through them.

Much of the advertising of the theatrical performance was done in the form of handbills which have nearly all disappeared and left a void for the theatre researcher. Some few programs for the Fort Smith theatre do exist in the Fort Smith Collections at the Carnegie Library at Fort Smith and were consulted. The Harvard College Theatre Collection contains one handbill for a performance in Dardanelle in the early

²⁵For a complete list of the newspapers which were read for this study, consult the bibliography.

1880's. The holdings of the Hertzberg Circus Collection at the San Antonio, Texas, Public Library were a rich source of material relating to the American circuses of the period, and the theatre collections of the University of Texas Library were used for general reference for the nineteenth century American theatre.

VII. THE ORGANIZATION

On the broadest level this study is presented as a historical study and is divided into two major historical divisions: theatrical entertainments before the Civil War, and theatrical entertainments from the end of the Civil War through 1889. The events of these two broad periods are presented in individual chapters dealing with the types of theatrical entertainments which were common at this time. These types of entertainments were: circuses, amateur dramatic efforts, minstrels, amusements and entertainments, and professional dramatic companies. The organization of each chapter is adapted to the findings relative to the particular type of entertainment it treats.

The straight chronological presentation of the findings is limited to four appendixes which contain the calendars of circus performances, professional minstrel performances, professional amusements and entertainments, and professional dramatic companies.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, 1817-1889

Each region of the American frontier had its own particular problems in taming the hostile country, and northwest Arkansas was no exception. An understanding of the settlement and subsequent history of this section of Arkansas will be of value in establishing perspective for a discussion of the development of theatrical entertainments.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: first, to chart the historical development of the region from the earliest settlement through 1864; second, to present the main events of two and one-half decades following the Civil War; and, third, to present findings concerning the public halls and opera houses which were built in the region following the Civil War.

I. THE FRONTIER: 1817-1864

Lying between Missouri and Louisiana, Arkansas is an area of diverse topography. The upland region in the northwest section was once clad in dense hardwoods; "oak, hickory, ash, with occasional patches of dark cedar and shortleaf pine."¹ This upland section is bisected by the lazy, unpredictable Arkansas River which flows

¹John Gould Fletcher, Arkansas (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 4.

diagonally through the state. It enters at the present location of the city of Fort Smith and moves to the southeast where it empties into the Mississippi River. With the exception of the river valley lands, and the plateau in Washington and Benton Counties, northwest Arkansas is predominantly mountainous. The Ouachita Mountains lie to the south of the Arkansas River and the Ozarks to the north. These mountains were the first serious obstacle encountered in the settlement of the Trans-Mississippi lands.²

Early Settlement

In 1817, Fort Smith was established to protect the white settlers, to keep peace between the Osages and the Cherokees, to control trade, and to prevent the white settlements from extending into the lands of the Indians.³ In the years following the establishment of the fort, the settlers came in increasing numbers. As early as 1820 the Arkansas Gazette referred to families going to Fort Smith by keel boat from Tennessee and Kentucky.⁴

These people who settled in northwest Arkansas were typical of the millions during the first half of the nineteenth century who left the more comfortable eastern and southern states and moved into

²Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion, A History of the American Frontier (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 406.

³Edwin C. Bearss, "In Quest of Peace on the Indian Border: The Establishment of Fort Smith," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXIII (Summer, 1964), p. 128.

⁴Arkansas Post Arkansas Gazette, March 25, 1820.

the wild and untamed wilderness to the west of the Mississippi. The educational or cultural attainments of the early settlers were not impressive. The explorer and naturalist, Thomas Nuttall, notes:

It is to be regretted that the widely scattered state of population in this territory, is but too favourable to the spread of ignorance and barbarism. The means of education are, at present, nearly proscribed, and like the French hunters who have preceded them, and who have almost forgot that they appertain to the civilized world. This barrier will, however, be effectually removed by the progressive accession of population, which, like a resistless tide, still continues to set toward the west.⁵

By 1828 the boundaries of Arkansas Territory were defined. The territory was then bounded on the west by the Choctaw from the Arkansas River at Fort Smith, south to the Red River, and by the Cherokee from Fort Smith to the southwest corner of Missouri. Thus it became the only state whose limit of extension was determined by Indian rights.⁶ The fact that Indian Territory bordered northwest Arkansas on the west influenced the growth and development of the whole region during the greater part of the nineteenth century.

The new settlements began to grow. By 1829 a post office had been established at Washington Courthouse and the name was changed to Fayetteville.⁷ Fort Smith had its first post office in March of the

⁵Reuben Goldthwaites (ed.), Early Western Travels: 1748-1846 (32 vols. Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904-1907), XIII, 161-162.

⁶Frederic L. Paxson, History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), p. 300.

⁷Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 876.

same year and Captain John Rogers was appointed as postmaster.⁸ By 1831 the first post office was opened at Phillips Landing, and the name changed to Van Buren.⁹ Still no population centers had developed which could boast of any theatrical entertainments.

Latrobe's Observations on Arkansas

In the early 1830's Charles Joseph Latrobe came down through Arkansas in a canoe on the Arkansas River. He was a man of foresight and perception, and his reflections on the region are prophetic. He was not impressed with the country, but he was hopeful.

What the back parts of Kentucky were some fifty years ago, and the Mexican province of Texas is now, that the country through which we were passing had been in the intermediate period, and indeed till within a very few years back; namely the sink into which the offscourings of the more settled parts of the country precipitated themselves.¹⁰

He then proceeds to describe in complete detail the "Murderer, red with crime . . . the Public defaulter . . . the speculator," and criminals of all degrees who flocked to this part of the frontier where they scattered themselves in the solitudes of the forest, or collected themselves together around the trading establishments, and scandalized "their white and Christian parentage by shameless and vicious lives"¹¹

⁸J. Fred Patton, "History of Fort Smith, Arkansas" (Unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1936), p. 26.

⁹Herndon, op. cit., p. 885.

¹⁰Charles Joseph Latrobe, The Rambler in North America: 1832-1833 (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1836), p. 257.

¹¹Ibid., p. 258.

From this harsh judgment Latrobe moves to an optimistic attitude and assures the reader that these men would be followed by men who had not been forced to flee but who wanted the freedom of the unshackled life, the spendthrift, or the debtor.

Many a man born and educated for better things, but who living badly or too freely in the old States, lastly mortgaging his estate, and plunging irrecoverably in debt, made over his debts and property to his eldest son, stole a horse, and off to Arkansas!¹²

Latrobe then assures the reader that Arkansas was on its way to being civilized. To follow was the development of law and order, the surveying of lands, roads, and courthouses built "with strong log-built gaols in their vicinity." Finally, chapels were to rise in the middle of forests, and hamlets thicken into villages, "anticipating in their lofty sounding names their future glories, as mighty towns and cities."¹³ While Latrobe's imagination might have seemed optimistic in 1833, it is nonetheless what happened, but hardly in the ten year span which he predicted.

The population of the region increased with the arrivals of settlers from the states of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Tennessee and Kentucky furnished the majority of the newcomers.¹⁴ After they made up their minds to move across the Mississippi, "they sold their lands, in fact everything but their slaves (those who owned slaves),

¹²Ibid., p. 259.

¹³Ibid., pp. 260-61.

¹⁴Herndon, op. cit., p. 197.

household effects, cooking and farming utensils--implements indispensable in a new country."¹⁵

In northwest Arkansas there was no great source of wealth such as the vast plantations of Mississippi, Louisiana, or those along the rivers in eastern Arkansas. The typical Arkansawyer

was far more likely to be a frontier settler in coonskin cap, blanket cape, and buckskin trousers . . . than a planter in a broadcloth coat, satin vest, and ruffled shirt, drinking his mint julep on a pillared verandah while his Negro slave waved palmleaf fans in his direction.¹⁶

Northwest Arkansas in 1840

By 1840 this section of the state had changed considerably since Thomas Nuttall made the trip to Fort Smith in 1819. Ozark was an incorporated town with the county seat of Franklin County located there.¹⁷ Van Buren, which had been divided into lots, was then the center of a large Indian trade. An 1840 description of the town lists "warehouses, wholesale grocers, dry goods stores, saloons, a saddlery shop, blacksmith, cabinet shop, numerous law offices and several of the ever present 'mercantile establishments.'"¹⁸ On up the river from Van Buren the work on the new fort which was being erected at Fort Smith was progressing slowly.¹⁹ In that town there were enough responsible

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Fletcher, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁷Herndon, op. cit., p. 904.

¹⁸Sam Hugh Park, "A Capsule History of Van Buren, From 1800 to 1900," Centennial edition Van Buren, Arkansas Press-Argus, September 1, 1961, p. 1.

¹⁹Herndon, op. cit., p. 848.

citizens to see the need for a school. One was established in 1840, and twenty pupils were enrolled during the year.²⁰ Up north over the mountains Fayetteville had grown to a town of 425; 292 were white and 123 were black of which 120 were slaves and three were free.²¹

Thus the region moved toward an ordered society much as Latrobe had predicted, and schools became increasingly common. The visit of the theatrical company in the spring of that year indicated a growing need for entertainments to fill the leisure hours of the citizens.

The slow construction of the military fort at Fort Smith during the late 1830's and early 1840's was in contrast to the last years of the 1840's when the town became a gateway to California. A mass of immigrants came through in the latter part of the decade using Fort Smith and Van Buren as points of departure for the southern route across the plains.²²

In the theatrical entertainments of this period before 1850 were numerous "firsts;" the first appearance of a circus in 1838; the first traveling theatrical combination in 1840; the first theatrical troupe in Fayetteville in 1841; in 1844-45 the first recorded amateur theatrical groups in Fort Smith and Van Buren; the first professional

²⁰David Y. Thomas (ed.), Arkansas and Its People (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), II, 819.

²¹William S. Campbell, One Hundred Years of Fayetteville, 1828-1928 (Jefferson City, Missouri; c. 1928), p. 10.

²²Arkansas, a Guide to the State, p. 145.

minstrel troupe in 1845; the first amateur minstrel performance in the same year; and the first "traveling lecturer" on record in 1849. As the area grew and became less isolated, the number of theatrical entertainments increased, and they became a part of the cultural and social life of the citizens of this section of the state.

Early City Taxes Levied Upon Theatrical Entertainments

During this period the first reported attempt to tax or control entertainments was made. The February 23, 1848, issue of the newly established Fort Smith Herald lists the city ordinances adopted by Fort Smith. The objective of these ordinances was to raise revenue. Among the taxes which the city levied were two which pertained to theatrical entertainment. Sections five and six read:

SECTION 5: There shall be levied and collected, as a city tax, the sum of two dollars for each and every day or night, on every circus, show, menagerie, theatre or exhibition kept, exhibited or opened in this city.

SECTION 6: Every person who shall keep, exhibit or open any circus menagerie, show, theatre or exhibition within this city, without first having a license therefore shall forfeit and pay for each and every day or night, the same shall be kept open or exhibited, the sum of five dollars together with the amount of tax as before required to be paid.²³

The population of the town had now grown to approximately six hundred.²⁴

The income from a tax levied on theatrical entertainments, however, could not have brought in any large amount in the last years of the

²³Fort Smith Herald, February 23, 1848.

²⁴Ibid., March 1, 1848.

1840's. There were few shows of the type described traveling in north-west Arkansas in 1848 and 1849. The only recorded show which would have produced tax revenue was a circus in 1848.

1850-1864

The gold excitement of 1849 drew a flood of emigrants up the Arkansas River through Fort Smith and Van Buren. In 1850 the population of the towns had increased throughout the whole region. The Seventh Census reports that the towns had the following populations in that year: Clarksville, 398;²⁵ Dardanelle, 477;²⁶ Fayetteville, 598;²⁷ Fort Smith, 964;²⁸ Van Buren, 549.²⁹ This same census fails to enumerate any person in the entire state of Arkansas who considered that his chief occupation was that of actor.³⁰ After 1851 the number of emigrants gradually decreased. There is no indication that this sudden influx of temporary citizens prompted any theatrical entertainment.

The absence of any extensive newspaper files for the greater part of the decade leaves no complete record of the events of the period. Thus, any reconstruction of the entertainments of those years must be based on incomplete sources. The newspapers in Little Rock are extant for the entire decade, but they shed little light on

²⁵United States Bureau of the Census, Seventh Census of the United States: 1850. Vol. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1853), p. 541.

²⁶Ibid., p. 546.

²⁷Ibid., p. 598.

²⁸Ibid., p. 537.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 553.

theatrical activities in northwest Arkansas. During most of the decade theatrical entertainments were the exception, rather than the rule in the entire state of Arkansas. The major events of this period were the traveling circuses which came in increasing numbers.

The Towns. During the decade before the Civil War, northwest Arkansas experienced a slow but steady growth both in wealth and population. By 1859 Van Buren boasted: "No town in Arkansas can boast the same number of extensive mercantile establishments, more solvent and wealthy merchants, or more substantial edifices both as stores and dwellings."³¹

Fayetteville was noted as a center of education from 1851 to 1861. A description of the town in 1852 mentions Miss Sawyer's female seminary and Arkansas College, a school for "boys and young men." These two schools attracted students from the south of Arkansas as well as Missouri and the Indian Country.³² The society was said to be equal to any in the South, the business men as prosperous, and the people intelligent, industrious, happy, and contented.³³

Although Fort Smith grew slowly during early years of this period, the city controlled the principal trade of all the Indian

³¹Van Buren Press, October 21, 1859.

³²History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889), p. 242.

³³Ibid.

Territory. It was also the chief depot for supplies for the western forts. The city had the advantage of the trade from the officers, soldiers, and employees of the fort.³⁴ A description of the town in 1854 was published in the Fort Smith Herald and Elevator in 1915.

The soldiers in the Fort Smith garrison were kept here for frontier duty, as well as being subject to orders to make hurried marches to other forts in the then far west. There was also stationed here hundreds of mule teams and drivers who were employed to haul supplies to the various forts that depended upon Fort Smith for their substance. Occasionally trouble in the far west necessitated calls for more soldiers than were maintained in the soldiers' garrison, and then there was plenty of bustle getting equipment ready and dashing off for points where their services were required. In these days Fort Smith, with the diversified population, such as Indians, half-breeds and a few scattered Negroes, with four or five hundred white citizens, was the most important commercial trading center west to St. Louis and for hundreds of miles beyond Fort Smith. The steamboats, two or three daily, brought hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of supplies through the year. These army supplies had to be kept in storehouses, and this necessitated the residence here of a large number of commissary employees. The garrison and fort had to maintain a blacksmith shop to shoe the mules and horses and make repairs of wagons. The tailors found plenty to do repairing officers' and soldiers' uniforms and dress suits. Society events were quite frequent among the army officers and the fashionable families of the village. Altogether, it was a particularly pleasant village in which to reside.³⁵

In contrast to the obscure early years of the decade, the last year of the 1850's and the early years of the 1860's was an active period of theatrical entertainment.

³⁴Ibid., p. 858.

³⁵Fort Smith Herald and Elevator, February 2, 1915.

Many advances were made during the last years of the decade. The Butterfield (or Overland) stage line was established between Fort Smith and Neosho, Missouri.³⁶ This stage line passed through Van Buren and Fayetteville. In 1860 the first telegraph line between Fort Smith and St. Louis was completed.³⁷

Civil War. The imminent threat of conflict between the North and South found supporters in the region for both the Union and the secession movement. The region, however, predominantly supported the ordinance of secession which was adopted by a state convention in May, 1861.³⁸ In June of that year Arkansas became a member of the Confederate States of America.³⁹

The region soon became the scene of some major battles of the early part of the war. In early March, 1862, the Battle of Pea Ridge was fought in Benton County and resulted in withdrawal to the south of the Confederate forces. The battle of Prairie Grove in Washington County in December of that year, while proclaimed a victory for the South, again resulted in a withdrawal by the Confederates. This withdrawal left the northwest part of the state prey to "Bushwhackers" and "Jayhawkers," "who plundered the people, neither side being able or willing to give them protection."⁴⁰

³⁶Herndon, op. cit., p. 857.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Herndon, op. cit., pp. 281-282.

³⁹Ibid., p. 282.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 672.

The towns of the region fared poorly under these uncertain conditions. Fayetteville exchanged hands several times during the war and the town was burned, destroying all of the buildings around the square.⁴¹ Van Buren fared no better. The war almost completely destroyed the town and laid waste the surrounding country.⁴²

Fort Smith was occupied by Confederate forces under the command of Col. Borland in April, 1861.⁴³ The Union forces, however, ultimately controlled the city for the remainder of the conflict. Much of the town was destroyed, and by the end of the war it presented an "appearance of general desolation."⁴⁴ Many of the citizens fled to Texas and spent the duration of the conflict away from their homes and businesses. The town suffered from the "bushwhackers" and "outlaws" who roamed the whole region during and after the war. These bands were composed largely of deserters or slackers from both Southern and Northern armies.⁴⁵ They raided, robbed, and killed indiscriminately and made living away from the towns and travel by land or water almost impossible.

By 1865 Fort Smith was crowded with thousands of refugees who

⁴¹Campbell, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴²Park, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴³Herndon, op. cit., p. 281.

⁴⁴Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 756.

⁴⁵Thomas, op. cit., pp. 819-20.

were utterly dependent upon the government for support.⁴⁶

Summary

In the period from the earliest settlement to 1865, northwest Arkansas grew from a primeval wilderness to a region civilized enough to warrant the destruction of war. This civilization had established law and order, and had made the region a relatively safe place to live. The leisure hours of the people had been filled at times with various forms of amusements and theatrical entertainments, but the war had put a stop to all such refinements. The end of the war in 1865 found a people disappointed, stunned, and crushed. It was some years before extensive theatrical entertainments could be sustained with any regularity.

II. GROWTH AND PROSPERITY: 1865-1889

The history of northwest Arkansas during the twenty-five years from 1865 through 1889 was not as exciting nor as romantic as the early years of frontier settlement and the Civil War. Immediately following the war, the region was the habitat of bushwhackers and ex-bushwhackers who had turned into open bandits.⁴⁷ The election of Powell Clayton as the Republican governor in 1868 marked the beginning of reconstruction in the state, an era which reached its culmination in 1874

⁴⁶Fort Smith New Era, March 18, 1865.

⁴⁷Fletcher, op. cit., p. 199.

in a power struggle called "The Brooks-Baxter War." The result of this "war" was the removal of the "Carpetbaggers" from office and the control of the state government by native Arkansawyers.⁴⁸

Some significant developments in northwest Arkansas in the twenty-five years following the war were: the coming of the railroads; the great influx of population made possible by the railroads; the establishment of the state university at Fayetteville; and the appointment of Judge Isaac Parker to head the federal court at Fort Smith.

The Railroads

The Fort Smith and Little Rock Railroad was first projected as early as 1853 by eastern capitalists.⁴⁹ The plans were slow to crystalize and were interrupted by the Civil War. Immediately following the war the men of Fort Smith began another push for the completion of this railroad. Newspaper editors were ardent supporters of the scheme and continually prodded the leaders to push the project to completion. One article urging action ends: "Gentlemen, one and all, wake up to your interests, put your shoulders to the wheels and let us put these roads through to a speedy completion."⁵⁰ By 1872 the road had been completed as far as Van Buren where the freight and passengers were transferred for Fort Smith.⁵¹

⁴⁸Herndon, op. cit., pp. 307-315.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 523.

⁵⁰Fort Smith New Era, September 30, 1865.

⁵¹Herndon, loc. cit.

Fort Smith had to wait until the middle of 1876 before it heard the sound of the "iron horse" within the city. A great celebration was held on July 24, 1876, in honor of the total completion of the line from Little Rock to Fort Smith.⁵²

Fayetteville was connected with the growing nationwide network of railroads when the St. Louis, Arkansas and Texas Railway was completed from Missouri, through Fayetteville to Fort Smith in 1882.⁵³ While the major influence of the railroads was felt in commercial ventures, other changes were important also. No longer did the citizens have to wait upon the uncertain river or the uncomfortable stages to enter and leave the region. Not only were citizens better able to visit other parts of the state and nation, but also visitors found it at last convenient to reach the northwest part of the state of Arkansas,

The railroads influenced theatrical entertainment as well as other social and cultural events of the region. More interchange could take place between local groups, circuses could cover more territory than in the days of the wagon shows, and professional theatrical companies could find a dependable method for arriving at the right town on the correct date.

Population Growth

Another result of the completion of the railroads was the opening of new lands for settlement. A swift increase in population

⁵²Fort Smith New Era, July 26, 1876.

⁵³Thomas, op. cit., II, 434.

occurred in the twenty-five year period. In 1860 the population of the major towns in the region was: Fayetteville, 976; Fort Smith, 1,530; and Van Buren, 969.⁵⁴ After the railroads were completed in the 1870's and 1880's, the towns began to experience unprecedented growth. The Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890, lists the growth of the towns in the region between 1880 and 1890. Fayetteville had a population of 1,788 in 1880 and of 2,942 by 1890.⁵⁵ Van Buren had reached only 1,029 in 1880 but increased to 2,291 by 1890.⁵⁶ In 1880 Fort Smith had a population of 3,099 and by 1890 had almost quadrupled to 11,311 citizens.⁵⁷ Dardanelle and Russellville, which were quite small before the war, were both well over 1200 people in 1890.⁵⁸ Because of this great influx of people, the region was considered by its residents as being on a "boom" and the increase in amusements and entertainments reflected the boom atmosphere.

Arkansas Industrial University

Educational matters in the region were given a great boost when the Arkansas Industrial University opened in Fayetteville in 1872.⁵⁹ This fledgling institution developed into a school of good

⁵⁴Population of the United States in 1860 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), I, 19.

⁵⁵The Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I: Population (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), p. 68.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 67-69.

⁵⁹Thomas, op. cit., p. 487.

reputation and attracted students from all over Arkansas as well as from out of the state. The Industrial University eventually became known as the University of Arkansas. The presence of this institution influenced the cultural activities of the whole region in the years following its establishment.

Fort Smith and Judge Parker's Court

Fort Smith was the largest town in the region and became the center of the economic and cultural life of the surrounding country. A description of the town in 1874 reveals its frontier character at that time.

Our town is presenting a most lively appearance. The streets are covered with wagons; produce of all kinds is coming in at a lively rate and the piles of cotton bales in front of the stores are looming up pretty large. Then there is a large number of people in attendance at the U. S. Court, people of every shade of color and condition, from Indian Territory. The extraordinary variety of the human species now thronging our streets would doubtless be of great interest to one not accustomed to see the sight, and a picture taken on any fine day of the crowd on the steps and porch of the courthouse in the old garrison and adjoining grounds would form a most unique coup d'oeil.⁶⁰

The location of the United States Court at Fort Smith in the 1870's led to the town's becoming the seat of Judge Isaac Parker, famed as "the hanging judge."⁶¹ This court had jurisdiction over all crimes committed in the Indian Territory.⁶² The court was necessary

⁶⁰Fort Smith New Era, November 25, 1874.

⁶¹Fletcher, op. cit., p. 275.

⁶²Patton, op. cit., p. 164.

because of the horde of desperate criminals who terrified settlers in Indian Territory. These outlaws banded together to defy the courts and even killed officers who were sent to arrest them. Judge Parker became a name feared by the lawless. In his twenty-one years as judge he tried nearly ten thousand persons, and 158 of them were hanged on the famous scaffold, which was torn down and burned after Judge Parker's death.⁶³ Judge Parker's hangings were usually public, and crowds would come to town to see one of the celebrated events.

Summary

The major developments of the period--the railroads, population increase, the establishment of the University at Fayetteville, and the location of the U. S. Court in Fort Smith--were all a part of the growth of the region in the twenty-five years following the Civil War. Coupled with the events of early settlement and the war years, the history of the region is varied and interesting. From the small frontier fort established in 1817, Fort Smith grew to be a city of over eleven thousand people by 1890. The other towns of the region paralleled that growth to a lesser degree. The society which resulted from this growth supported various forms of theatrical entertainments and amusements from 1840-1889. These entertainments and amusements are the subject of the remainder of this study.

⁶³Fletcher, op. cit., pp. 275-76.

III. PUBLIC HALLS AND OPERA HOUSES

Following the Civil War, the developments which influenced theatrical entertainments were those which led to the construction of permanent halls in the towns of the region. This section presents a brief chronology of the evolution of public theatre facilities in Fort Smith, Van Buren, Fayetteville, and Russellville. Several other towns had "Opera Houses" before 1889, but extant newspapers leave little information about the "halls" or "Opera Houses."

Fort Smith

The development of public halls for theatrical events paralleled the growth and development of Fort Smith. There were numerous halls which were, at one time or another, used for performances. Some of these were used only once or twice, and some became the center of all social and cultural life in the town.

Early Halls. The first "hall" reported in the newspapers following the Civil War was Kannady's New Hall, which opened in December, 1868. It was located on Garrison Avenue and was probably above a store.⁶⁴ In the following year the St. Charles Hotel Hall was used for some amateur performances.⁶⁵ The Turner Hall was proposed in March, 1870 and was to be sponsored by the Turn Verein [sic.]. Nothing

⁶⁴Fort Smith Weekly Herald, December 19, 1868; January 2, 1869.

⁶⁵Fort Smith New Era, February 3, 1869.

seems to have come of this initial effort by the citizens to build a suitable hall for public assemblies, balls, theatres, etc. On some occasions entertainments were given in the Episcopal Church.⁶⁶

Adelaide Hall. The most popular and utilized public hall was Adelaide Hall, located in the Fishback Block on Garrison Avenue. The New Era first mentioned this hall in September, 1871, when it was used for a lecture.⁶⁷ As was customary with halls of this sort, it was even used as a skating rink at times.⁶⁸

In 1873 Col. Fishback remodeled the hall for "theatrical purposes, in style and manner not excelled in larger cities."⁶⁹ The popularity of the hall was complete until someone questioned the safety of the structure in December, 1877.⁷⁰ Col. Fishback's answer to the criticism is the first reported description of the hall. In the Weekly Herald he presented to the public the following information:

It has fourteen walls supporting its floor, each floor of the building is strongly anchored with twenty-one iron anchors, and the roof is a self supporting roof which for six weeks after it was built, had no columns under it at all. It now has eight columns under it, none of which are needed, as it is built to support itself. The building itself, is believed to have the best foundation of any building in town, built with especial reference to absolute safety. It has been subject to tests

⁶⁶Ibid., December 16 and 23, 1870.

⁶⁷Ibid., September 29, 1871.

⁶⁸Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 13, 1872.

⁶⁹Ibid., May 17, 1873.

⁷⁰Ibid., December 31, 1877.

which no other owner of mere halls, not built especially for dancing, would ever allow his hall subjected to. At. Gen. Bonneville's wedding there were 192 persons on the floor at once dancing, keeping step to music, yet a single company of soldiers [sic.] are not allowed to cross the strongest bridge without breaking step.

I have not corrected the reports heretofore because it has not been a paying investment to me and whenever Fort Smith gets tired of it, I am willing to convert it to other purposes. I do so now only because so earnestly requested. I would certainly not keep a hall which is not paying me, if I thought it in the least unsafe.

William M. Fishback⁷¹

A board of architects and builders inspected the building later in the month and said that "an improper defect in the arrangement of the columns and the construction of the roof, made the building appear unsafe." This was corrected and the building pronounced safe.⁷²

In 1880 Adelaide Hall was leased along with the rest of the Fishback block for use as a "first class Hotel."⁷³ This resulted in the lack of suitable public halls in the city and prompted the following statement in one paper: "Several theatrical troupes have written for a hall since Adelaide Hall ceased to be Miss Hall and became Mrs. Hotel."⁷⁴ When the Fishback Block burned in 1885, the Fort Smith Tribune was prompted to reminisce about "Adelaide Hall."

Of late years the Fishback Block was of little concern to the masses of our people except as an important business block, but in the days gone by when Adelaide Hall was extant and was the glory of the pleasure loving community, this old block was the headquarters for feasting and gaity. Here gathered the

⁷¹Ibid., January 7, 1878.

⁷²Ibid., January 28, 1878.

⁷³Fort Smith Elevator, February 27, 1880.

⁷⁴Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, March 3, 1880.

young and the old, the grave and the gay, everything centered in Adelaide Hall. It was the scene of every grand ball and everything possessed of magnificence and splendor. Within its grim old walls many a sighing swain has whispered sweet words to his lady love; and many a trusting maiden has partaken plenteously of this tempting taffy. Here the soft sweet strains of music cheered saddened hearts and here smiling faces and words of cheer often dispelled dark despair and lightened hearts made heavy by life's blighted hopes. The name of Adelaide Hall will always recall memories of the happy past--sweet memories of the days gone by.⁷⁵

Devaney Hall. A new hall was dedicated on March 17, 1880, and was called Devaney Hall. This hall was actually the old Presbyterian Church which had been completely remodeled to handle the local entertainments as well as traveling troupes.⁷⁶ It was located on Washington Street in the lower part of the city. This isolated location and the size of the building led the editor of Wheeler's Independent to write: "The Devaney Hall on Washington Street is a neat little building, but its dimensions and location militate against it. The truth is, it is too small to accommodate a very remunerative audience."⁷⁷

Academy of Music. Prompted by the lack of any suitable space for entertainments, Professor D. W. C. Botefuhr, the city's musical mentor, encouraged the city leaders to organize an association to plan for the construction of the "Academy of Music."⁷⁸ This organization met continually through the spring of 1881. After several false starts

⁷⁵Daily Fort Smith Tribune, May 8, 1885.

⁷⁶Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, April 21, 1880.

⁷⁷Ibid., April 27, 1881.

⁷⁸Ibid.

the building was begun in the spring of 1882 on the southwest corner of what was then Walnut and Franklin Streets, now Seventh and North "A" Streets.⁷⁹

Professor Botefuhr worked tirelessly to see the completion of the building, and he was given credit for the final result.⁸⁰ During the period of construction the name of the new building was variously called Botefuhr's Hall, The Academy of Music, The Opera House, and The Music Hall. It was not until October, 1883, that this project was completed and the city finally had "a first class Opera House." A description of the building was published in the Weekly Elevator in August of 1883.

The building is sixty by one hundred and ten feet, with a twenty-eight foot ceiling. It will have a half price gallery capable of seating one hundred and fifty. The main auditorium will seat six hundred, giving it a seating capacity of seven hundred and fifty.

The proscenium is twenty-one by twenty-five feet, behind which is a large stage.

The scenery and drop curtain are to be works of art and mounted in perfect working order. They have cost about one thousand dollars, had not twenty-eight of our enterprising merchants nearly made up the amount by advertising on the drop curtain, which will be so arranged that the advertisements will not appear offensively prominent.

The seating of the hall is to be so arranged as to give a view of the stage as good as if the floor were pitched from front to rear, thus giving a hall suitable for all purposes.⁸¹

The opening of the Academy of Music was a grand social event.

⁷⁹Fort Smith Elevator, March 17 and 31, 1882.

⁸⁰Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, April 5, 1882.

⁸¹Fort Smith Elevator, August 17, 1883.

Professor Botefuhr directed the first act of the opera Martha complete with a chorus of forty-four voices. This was followed by speeches, dancing, and a supper which was served from eleven p.m. to three a.m.⁸²

The Academy of Music was leased by J. H. Clendening, who managed all entertainment in the theatre. He had to put up with such nuisances as a lack of proper heating in the building, inadequate space for chairs, and poor lighting. These conditions were improved and numerous amateur and professional entertainments were presented there in the next four years.

Grand Opera House. For four years the Academy of Music building served as the center of the social and cultural life of the town, but in 1887 several business men, confident that Fort Smith was destined to be a great city, organized a company for the erection of a fifty thousand dollar Grand Opera House. The company called itself "The Grand Opera House Company of Fort Smith," and the incorporators were Ben T. DuVal, Henry Reutzel, C. F. Bocquin, and John S. Park.⁸³ The new company petitioned the city for immunity from license for a period of five years, and this petition was granted.⁸⁴

The old Academy of Music building was sold at auction for \$16,900 in March, 1887.⁸⁵ Also in the spring of 1887 the foundation

⁸²Ibid., October 12, 1883.

⁸³Van Buren Press, February 26, 1887.

⁸⁴Fort Smith Elevator, April 29 and May 6, 1887.

⁸⁵Ibid., March 25, 1887.

for the new opera house was laid, and it opened in the fall. A description of the building indicates the optimism of the company, and the emphasis was placed on the word Grand in the title of the theatre.

The size of the building is 76 x 140 feet, is three stories high and has five store rooms on the first floor, and the theatre occupies all the upper floors, except a few offices in front; the auditorium is reached by wide flights of stairs from the main entrance. The seating capacity is about eleven hundred. There are eight private boxes. The stage is very large and not exceeded by any in the southwest, and ample for the production of any play. The stage is reached by a wide stairway in the rear. The dressing rooms, thirteen in number, are situated on the stage and under the stage. There will be two fire balconies on the side of the building with iron ladders to the ground. The entire building is to be heated with steam. The frescoing of the interior is very beautiful and reflects great credit to the architects. The scenery, which was furnished by same parties, is very complete. The seating will be of fine opera chairs. The boxes will be furnished with drapery curtains, etc., and there will be two painted drop curtains.

The building and ground cost about \$80,000, and will be entirely completed and occupied inside of seven months from the time of breaking ground. . . . Great credit is due the owners for giving the people of Fort Smith such a fine place of amusement, and it should be appreciated by all.⁸⁶

The building was opened on October 10, 1887, with a performance of the Lizzie Evans Company in Our Angel.⁸⁷

George Tilles was selected as the manager of the new Grand Opera House and one paper commends the choice.

Although the business is new to Mr. Tilles he has shown an aptitude for theatrical management that betokens a natural capacity for business. No better selection could have been made.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Ibid., September 30, 1887.

⁸⁷Ibid., October 14, 1887.

⁸⁸Ibid., November 25, 1887.

Tilles said of the Grand Opera House in later years: "This theatre was too far in advance of the town at that time--the best attractions were brought here--but all at a loss."⁸⁹ The Grand Opera House later was called the Grand Theatre, then the Tilles Theatre, and then the Grand again.⁹⁰

The Grand Opera House closed as a "legitimate" theatre in April, 1911, and became a vaudeville theatre.⁹¹ In 1921 it had become a commercial building housing the Brown-Hinton Wholesale Grocery Co.⁹² The building was torn down only a few years ago, and the space is now occupied by a parking lot.

Van Buren

In Van Buren the first public hall put to use following the Civil War was the Court Room in the Court House. It was the scene of an amateur performance given in December, 1866.⁹³ In 1868 the major space seems to have been the hall at the Female Seminary or Academy. These two locations served as theatres for several years.

The first effort toward a "permanent" facility was Hinkle Hall,

⁸⁹Fort Smith Times-Record, July 10, 1921.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Clipping of unknown origin, dated April 2, 1911, located in Volume XI, p. 58, The Weaver Scrapbooks, on Microfilm at the University of Arkansas Library.

⁹²Fort Smith Times-Record, July 10, 1921.

⁹³Van Buren Press, December 23, 1866.

which was projected to be made ready for theatricals and concert purposes in 1875;⁹⁴ however, there is no indication that the owners equipped the space very elaborately. The Court House and Hinkle Hall accommodated most of the performances until 1876.

In September, 1876, E. Robinson announced that he planned to build a two-story building with a public hall overhead. He intended it to be "the pleasantest hall in town."⁹⁵ A description of the building was printed in the Van Buren Press in November.

The Robinson Opera House is a fine building, and lends a very pleasant look to the upper part of the town. The hall is the best for dancing-parties and entertainments, that we have ever had in Van Buren. The stage is prettily arranged, and will be splendidly mounted and the facilities offered for theatrical entertainments will be superior to those of any hall in this part of the state.⁹⁶

The Opera House was completed the following week, and the initial professional troupe was the Globe Dramatic Company, which played in it in early December of 1876.⁹⁷

Murphy Temperance Society Hall. A new hall was constructed in 1878 by the Murphy Temperance Society and inaugurated by an entertainment in August of that year. A description of it states:

A large and well arranged stage has been put at the back end of the room. The beams that exposed the roof have been

⁹⁴Ibid., March 16, 1875.

⁹⁵Ibid., September 12, 1876.

⁹⁶Ibid., November 7, 1876.

⁹⁷Ibid., December 5, 1876.

covered, the walls white-washed, new chandeliers and side lamps illuminate the room and taking it all in all, we have a first-class hall and concert-room.⁹⁸

This hall was the frequent scene of amateur theatricals, as well as concerts and other entertainments.

This Temperance Society hall, the Court House, Hinkle Hall and Robinson Opera House were the locations of numerous social and cultural events over the next few years.

McKibben Opera House. In 1883 the McKibben Opera House was opened. No expense was spared "to make it commodious, safe, and well ventilated."⁹⁹ The hall was opened with a performance of the St. Quentin Opera Company in November, 1883. The new opera house was reported to have a stage mounted with beautiful scenery and a drop curtain which was "too-too utterly lovely" for the report's "beggarly description."¹⁰⁰ Mr. McKibben was highly praised by the reporter:

Words are thoroughly inadequate to express the gratitude that wells up in our heart toward the heroic proprietor of the unparalleledly [*sic.*] excellent building and Opera House. It will be an enduring ornament to our town, a source of pride to our every citizen and we feel sure that we re-echo the sentiments of every man, woman and child in our community, when we cry out with all the concentrated intensity of our nature: "Three cheers for our heroic McKibben and his new Opera House, and may he receive lots of pecuniary remuneration for his indomitable energy. "Hip, hip Hurrah!"¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Ibid., August 13, 1878.

⁹⁹Ibid., November 10, 1883.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., November 24, 1883.

¹⁰¹Ibid., November 10, 1883.

The city made much use of this facility and many hours of entertainment took place within its walls. In 1889 the space was leased to W. H. Ross, and the name changed to the "Ross Opera House."¹⁰² Ross maintained his lease on the space into the next decade, but toward the end of the decade the building burned.

Fayetteville

Following the Civil War the earliest room used as a theatre in Fayetteville was reported to be the Blackwell Room. It was used by Professor DeLay, the "Far-famed Wizard of the West," for one of his performances in September, 1868.¹⁰³ In 1869 performances took place at the Seminary Building, and in 1870 McIlroy's Hall was the scene of a concert.¹⁰⁴ In 1871 the New Orleans Gaiete Troupe played in the Court Hall, and this space was used by many performers in the next few years.¹⁰⁵ In 1874 a new hall was opened called Botefuhr and Springer's Hall. It was the locale of both amateur and professional performances during the year.¹⁰⁶

The University Hall was used from 1874 to 1890 as a space for many events at Arkansas Industrial University. In January, 1876, the Globe Dramatic Troupe played in Baum's Hall,¹⁰⁷ and returned to play

¹⁰²Ibid., September 7, 1889.

¹⁰³Fayetteville Democrat, September 19, 1868.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., January 22, 1870.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., June 3, 1871.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., April 4, 1874.

¹⁰⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, January 4, 1877.

in the same space the following fall.¹⁰⁸

Van Winkle Hall. Around 1879 Peter D. Van Winkle built the Van Winkle Hotel, reputed to be the largest frame building in the entire state at that time. In it Van Winkle included an Opera House on the third story.¹⁰⁹ This third floor room was the main center for theatrical entertainments until 1887.

In 1885 the Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel printed the following plea for an Opera House.

Why cannot Fayetteville have a first-class opera house? Surely one would pay here as well as at Van Buren, Fort Smith, or Bentonville. All we lack is the enterprise and the nerve. Let everybody talk opera house for the next six months. The wind work must be done first. Let it begin that we may the sooner have the reality.¹¹⁰

Wood's Opera House. It was not until 1887 that this need was satisfied. In an article reprinted from the Fayetteville Republican, a complete description of the new facility appears in the Arkansas Sentinel in July of that year.

A new Opera House in Fayetteville, and one of the finest in Arkansas, is a settled fact. For some months past, negotiations to this end have been pending between Mr. Harvey Hudgins, of Hot Springs, owner of the Opera House Block in this city, and John P. Wood, Proprietor of the famous Auction Store. Mr. Hudgins commences work at once on the hall, and will have it completed and ready for business between the middle of August and

¹⁰⁸Ibid., November 7, 1877.

¹⁰⁹Campbell, op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 25, 1885.

the first of September. When finished it will be known as Wood's Opera House, and turned over to the proprietor, Mr. John P. Wood, who has leased it for one year, with the privilege of five years.

The building is two stories high and the walls well secured and floor of the hall well supported, and located in the heart of the business center of the city. The hall is 100 x 40 feet in size, with splendid acoustic properties, and will be furnished in the most modern manner. It will be seated with folding Opera chairs and lighted by the latest improved incandescent lights. The scenery is from the well known scenic studio of Sosman & Landis, Chicago, and in beauty and elegance ranks beyond anything ever seen here. Fine border and foot lights, with two trap doors and all modern stage machinery will be used, so that any play ever presented to the public can be placed on this stage. It will be neat and tasty in every respect, and something that the rapid growth of Fayetteville, and its long established reputation for amusement attractions, has long demanded.¹¹¹

Wood secured the services of Damon Clarke as the manager and he started to book attractions for the fall season in the summer months.¹¹²

In early August the scenery and seats for "Wood's Opera House" arrived and the "temple of the drama" was finished in September.¹¹³ The new Opera House was opened in early September with a presentation of Pygmalion and Galatea by the White Wings, a local amateur dramatic club.¹¹⁴ The Opera House was pronounced to be one of the "neatest little opera houses in the country." The dedicatory address by the mayor, Col. O. C. Gray, was reported to have been "replete with classic

¹¹¹Fayetteville Republican, n.d., reprinted in Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, July 5, 1887.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, August 9, 1887.

¹¹⁴Ibid., September 6, 1887.

lore and blended the past ages with the present in a manner to rivet the attention of his interested auditors."¹¹⁵

In November Wood was commended by the Arkansas Sentinel for his work in securing the best shows possible for his Opera House, but the public was cautioned to give him more patronage or they would have to content themselves "with 'old barn stormers' or 'fly by night snaps' that take our money and give us an indifferent entertainment in return."¹¹⁶ In January, Damon Clarke resigned as the manager of the Opera House because of other business, and Mr. Wood took over as full-time manager. Later in the month Mr. Wood answered criticism that his prices were too high.

For the benefit of those who do not understand the management of theatrical companies, I will say, that all managers of traveling troupes reserve the right in making the contracts with Opera Houses to fix the prices themselves. I have used my best discretion in contracting only with what was considered first-class companies for this reason, (a few exceptions in which I was imposed upon).

The immense expense connected with a large company with a full house in Fayetteville at one dollar a seat leaves them no profit, barely their expenses.

We have had and will have some of the finest companies in the West this season and the correspondence connected with them, has taken a great deal of my time, and if our people want to see them, all is well; if not, it is an easy matter to get cheap companies.

I have Kate Bensberg Opera Co., Patti Rosa, M'lle Rhea, Hallen and Hart to follow, all of them at the top of the theatrical profession. If I conclude at the end of their engagements that our citizens prefer cheap fifty-cent shows, then someone else will have to run an opera house here, for I cannot get good companies for less than \$1 a seat, and if they are not patronized

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid., November 1, 1887.

it is not my fault and next season the Opera House will be closed and used for commercial purposes, plans for which I have already in view.¹¹⁷

The audiences seemed to improve and when the first season of the new Opera House drew to a close, the Fayetteville Democrat reports:

While Mr. Wood has made no money for himself yet by his tact and energy he has succeeded in getting some of the best troupes in the country to come here. . . . Mr. Wood has not decided whether he will run the opera house next year or not as he is offered more rent for the building to be used for other purposes than he can possibly make by continuing it as an opera house. He certainly deserves the thanks of theater goers for what he has done and we believe they fully appreciate his services.¹¹⁸

The season closed with a performance of the Katie Putnam Comedy Company, and at the close of the performance Katie Putnam chased Wood about the stage with a cane. When he was finally caught he was presented a note and the cane which Miss Putnam used in the chase. The note was signed by thirty prominent citizens of Fayetteville, and the cane was solid ebony "with a crook of solid gold, elegantly chased (although not so pretty a 'chase' as Mr. Wood made in his hurry to get away!) and, with the following engraving on one side: 'to John P. Wood. Close Opera Season 1887-88.'¹¹⁹

Despite the threats made at the end of the season, the Opera House opened in the fall of 1888, and numerous companies played that season. In February of 1889 more threats were made to close the Opera

¹¹⁷Ibid., January 17, 1888.

¹¹⁸Fayetteville Democrat, April 20, 1888.

¹¹⁹Fayetteville Republican, n.d., reprinted in the Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, May 8, 1888.

House and then the "lovers of drama will have to go to Fort Smith to see a play."¹²⁰ At the close of the second season the Arkansas Sentinel reported the new difficulty with which Wood had to cope. The city and county licenses imposed upon the performances at the Opera House were pronounced as "perfectly preposterous and a barrier" to theatrical companies visiting the city.¹²¹ Wood refused to book any companies for the third season because of the taxes, and the fall season was very much reduced. Wood continued to operate the Opera House until 1895 when Hudgins, the owner of the building, moved his family to Fayetteville and assumed full management of the theatre.¹²² The building is still standing on the southwest corner of the square and houses the J. C. Penney store.

Russellville

The first hall reported to be used for theatrical purposes in Russellville was at what was called the "College Building." This was the scene of an amateur production of The Ten Virgins in December, 1876.¹²³ This same building was referred to as "the College Hall" a year later when the Globe Dramatic Company played in it.¹²⁴ In

¹²⁰Fayetteville Democrat, February 15, 1889.

¹²¹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, July 23, 1889.

¹²²Campbell, op. cit., p. 90.

¹²³Russellville Democrat, December 21, 1876.

¹²⁴Ibid., December 6, 1877.

January the Russellville Democrat urged that "some public spirited man" build a good hall which would be "suitable to use for public exhibitions, lectures, suppers, etc.," for he would not only "confer a benefit upon the town," but also find it "a paying investment."¹²⁵ Later that year some indication was made that such a hall might be built. The Democrat reports:

We understand that there are serious thoughts by some of our more substantial citizens of building a city hall. This is just what we should have and has been needed very much for several years.¹²⁶

But the College Hall continued to be the only suitable space for theatrical entertainments.

In April, 1880, the Globe Dramatic Company played in "McGarthur Hall,"¹²⁷ and that fall the Mabel Norton Combination occupied Tucker Hall over Buck's dry goods store.¹²⁸ The Masonic building was the scene of a performance by the Mabel Norton Combination in May, 1881,¹²⁹ and was used the following two years by theatrical troupes. In October, 1884, the Knights of Honor Hall was the location of a performance by the Chicago Comedy Company.¹³⁰

In 1885 the following article appears in the Democrat:

At last Russellville is about to obtain that which has long been felt a pressing need, namely--a public hall, especially fitted

¹²⁵Ibid., January 31, 1878. ¹²⁶Ibid., August 1, 1878.

¹²⁷Ibid., April 22, 1880. ¹²⁸Ibid., December 16, 1880.

¹²⁹Ibid., May 19, 1881. ¹³⁰Ibid., October 23, 1884.

up for public gatherings of every kind. It is being built by that enterprising firm, Luker, Settle and Company adjoining their manufacturing establishment, and we are assured that when completed it will be adequate to all demands likely to be made upon it by a Russellville audience for many years. It will be in the upper story of the new addition to the Luker and Settle Building, will be 30 x 75 feet, with a 14 foot ceiling. The general public cannot fail to appreciate the spirit that prompts these gentlemen to furnish a convenience so long needed in this community.¹³¹

The first indication that the hall was completed came in 1886, when an amateur group presented Ten Nights in a Bar Room in the Luker and Davis Opera House.¹³² This space was used for the remainder of the 1880's for all theatrical presentations in the city of Russellville.

¹³¹Ibid., December 17, 1885.

¹³²Ibid., September 8, 1886.

PART I

1817-1864

CHAPTER III

CIRCUSES BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

As the frontier moved west of the Alleghenies, the earliest professional show which followed seemed "to have consisted of one man and one or more animals."¹ This act sometimes consisted of a man who walked from settlement to settlement with a trained monkey, acting dog, or a wrestling bear. Following this eventually came the menageries which exhibited animals in cages.² The wagon show circus evolved from these menageries.

Most of the early wagon shows featured equestrian performances, and by the late 1830's these shows had developed into a full complement of riders, clowns, and acrobats. These equestrian circuses were not a menagerie combined with a side show but "a circus pure and simple, an equestrian exhibition, neither less nor more."³

The path which these circuses followed in northwest Arkansas was established by the existing roads and trails. The earliest show traveled in the Arkansas River Valley and performed at the towns on

¹Everett Dick, The Dixie Frontier: A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 158.

²Ibid.

³Maria Ward Brown, The Life of Dan Rice (Long Branch, N. J.: Published by the Author, 1901), p. 104.

both sides of the river. The later shows came down from Missouri into Benton and Washington Counties and descended into the Arkansas River Valley where they played at Fort Smith and Van Buren before going down to Little Rock. On the trip down they usually played at the settlements on both sides of the river.

The circuses which came to northwest Arkansas prior to the Civil War attracted large audiences for the most part. The size of the audience generally depended on several factors: the weather, the extent of the advertising, and the reputation which preceded the circus from town to town. The popularity of the circus was a result of several factors, not the least of which was the rather exotic quality of the performances which appealed to the curiosity of the settlers.

Gil Robinson made some observations about the popularity of the circus in his book, Old Wagon Show Days:

The South was the ideal section for circuses of the early part of the last century. Railroads were slow in penetrating to the interior towns, which were small and widely scattered. Communication between different parts of the country was slow and unsatisfactory, and there was a great dearth of amusement outside of the "spelling bee" and the occasional "barn-floor" dances. The coming of the circus, consequently, was a great event. It not only furnished entertainment of a kind that appealed to the rugged lovers of outdoor life and muscular prowess, but it also brought town and country in touch with the outside world.⁴

Unless an outright "humbug," the circus could generally count on a successful series of appearances before the always curious settlers in northwest Arkansas.

⁴Gil Robinson, Old Wagon Show Days (Cincinnati: Brockwell Company, 1925), p. 27.

Another factor which might explain the popularity was the infrequency of circus appearances. Before the Civil War only six wagon shows were recorded as coming to the region, and in the late 1850's one circus arrived on the Showboat Banjo and played the towns along the river. It is quite possible that more played in the region but the records of any other performances are absent. One show which advertised was unable to fulfill the engagement because of the condition of the roads between Little Rock and Van Buren. Another circus advertised but no reports indicate that the performance occurred.

Each of the circuses will be discussed in the order of its appearance.

I. THE FIRST CIRCUS IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS, 1838

The earliest theatrical entertainment to be recorded for the northwest section of the state was W. Waterman and Company's Circus which performed there in 1838. This circus had appeared earlier in the year in Tallahassee, Florida.⁵ In Arkansas the show appeared in Batesville and other smaller settlements in the northeast part of the state in August, 1838.⁶ In September, the Little Rock papers carried advertisements for the appearance of the circus in the following towns in northwest Arkansas: Clarksville, on Monday, September 24, 1838; St.

⁵George L. Chindahl, A History of the Circus in America (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1959), p. 27.

⁶Batesville News, August 9 and 16, 1838.

Martins, Tuesday, September 25, 1838; and Dardanelle, Wednesday, September 26, 1838. In the interval between the August Batesville appearance and late September it is possible that the troupe traveled up the Arkansas Valley as far as Fort Smith and Van Buren. This circus was also advertised to appear at Little Rock on October 1, 1838, "for a few days only."⁷

The circus consisted primarily of equestrian feats. The Batesville News describes a performance of the circus:

Mr. Waterman, the two horse rider, I think he has not a superior, if an equal in this country. Mr. Johnson, the celebrated single horse rider, stands unrivaled; Mr. Lyons, the celebrated tumbler, plate dancer, and balancer, is superior to anything I ever witnessed but the last, though not the least, the clown, an old acquaintance, W. H. Creighton, is obliged to satisfy all for the trifling sum they have to pay.⁸

Other members of the troupe included Messrs. Goodspeed, Keeler, Bailey, and Gardner,⁹ as well as Master Hobbs and O. H. Perry.¹⁰ The price of admission was one dollar, and children and servants were admitted for half price.

III. ROCKWELL AND COMPANY'S EQUESTRIAN CIRCUS, 1848

After a false start in June, 1848, a second circus appeared in northwest Arkansas ten years after W. Waterman and Company's Circus

⁷Little Rock Times and Advocate, September 17, 1838; Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, September 19, 1838.

⁸Batesville News, n.d., quoted by Little Rock Times and Advocate, September 24, 1838.

⁹Little Rock Times and Advocate, September 17, 1838.

¹⁰Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, loc. cit.

appeared in Clarksville and Dardanelle in 1838. The false start occurred when Stickney's Grand National Circus was advertised with great flare. The circus was scheduled to perform at Ozark on the way up from Little Rock, and then it was to perform at both Van Buren and Fort Smith for two days each.¹¹ Due to the condition of the roads, however, the wagon show found it inadvisable to try the trek into northwest Arkansas, so it turned east from Little Rock and headed toward Memphis.¹²

In the fall lengthy advertisements promised the appearance of Rockwell and Company's Equestrian Circus in both Van Buren and Fort Smith, two days each, in late October. The fancies which the circus notices stirred can only be partially imagined in the present, a time more accustomed to spectacle. The advertisement states:

Artists, without number, and certainly without regard to expense have been employed during the past winter in manufacturing new costumes, housings, trappings, decoration and other paraphernalia to correspond with their magnificent pageantries, tournaments, cavalcades, and processions, which this company give on every representation. . . . The performance will commence with the magnificent spectacle entitled the Halt of the Bedouins, or the Arab's Bivouac.¹³

It further promises such other entertainments as: "Mr. Hiram W. Franklin, who has performed the almost incredible feat of throwing seventy-six consecutive sommersets;" Mrs. Thomas Nunn who was to appear as "Hebe or Morning Sprite" on a single horse; Mrs. William Lake on the slackwire; and a display of "antipodean gymnastics and muscular

¹¹Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, June 24, 1848.

¹²Ibid., October 7, 1848.

¹³Ibid.

evolutions," by Mr. Franklin and Master William Grady. In addition to these performers the staff and troupe included: Henry Rockwell, proprietor; S. Q. Stokes, Manager; Thomas Nunn, equestrian director; A. W. Pell, treasurer; William Lake, clown; Mr. B. Runnels, equestrian; and Mr. Fisher, Indian-rubber man. The performance was to be predominantly an equestrian show with acrobatic feats and some trained animals. The advertisement ended with the information that the whole show was "to conclude with a laughable afterpiece."¹⁴

The Van Buren paper contains the following statement which is of help in establishing the route of the circus:

This unrivaled troupe has exhibited through the state of Missouri, where their performances have given the highest gratification. . . . We see by the Springfield papers, that the citizens of that place were on the tiptoe of expectation, about the Circus, which was to have performed there on yesterday and today.¹⁵

When the circus did arrive in Van Buren the citizens were waiting for it. On the day of arrival, the editor of the paper states:

We would remind our citizens that Rockwell's magnificent Equestrian establishment will arrive here to-day, when our citizens can have an opportunity of witnessing the performances of this excellent company.¹⁶

It might be stated here that because of the advertising which advance agents purchased from the newspapers, the papers were more apt to give the circus "news" coverage. The Arkansas Intelligencer thoroughly chronicled the appearance of the circus in Van Buren on Saturday,

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, October 21, 1848.

October 21, and Monday, October 23, 1848.

Our city was visited, according to appointment, by Rockwell's fine circus, and our citizens have had the high gratification of witnessing, on last Saturday and Monday, the interesting equestrian and other performances of this excellent company; and all expressed great satisfaction and pleasure at the exhibition. On Monday evening the performances were of the most exhilarating character, and the audience was inspired with a high enthusiasm, and the whole went off happily. It is but an act of justice to say that the whole troupe performed their parts to perfection.¹⁷

The editor singles out all of the stars for special praise. His warmest words are saved for the clown, William Lake. Of him he says:

Mr. Lake, the clown, left a favorable impression. His part the most difficult, the difficulties of which are the least understood, was well performed. No one ever served up old things in a new style, or new ones in a better style than does the inimitable Lake. The originality of his humor, and adaptability and applicability of his acts, looks and words, all go to prove him excellent in his line. All agree that a better clown never trod the ring.¹⁸

When the circus appeared in Fort Smith on October 24 and 25, the editor of the Herald prints only the following two sentences: "Rockwell's Circus arrived in town yesterday, and performed last night. Every person that can raise a dime is going to see the fun."¹⁹

This small equestrian wagon show was the second of many circuses which entertained the people of this region over the next few decades.

¹⁷Ibid., October 28, 1848.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Fort Smith Herald, October 25, 1848.

III. THE CIRCUS OF MESSRS. E. F. AND J. MABIE, 1851

In the late fall of 1851 the Mabie Brothers' Circus performed in the region. The one appearance which was recorded was on Friday, December 5, 1851, at Fort Smith, although other towns in the area were certainly included in the tour. The event was well received by an audience of about two thousand persons.

Every person appeared surprised at such a collection of people; every part of the large pavillion was crowded and we will venture the assertion, that it will prove to be a larger audience, than will be collected at any other place in the state.²⁰

For a town of almost one thousand citizens to double in size for a circus performance was evidence of the wide appeal which traveling circuses had among the citizens of northwest Arkansas. The circus was predominantly an equestrian show with the usual clowns and acrobats.

The Mabie Brothers' Circus was well known from Wisconsin to Texas and always appeared as a wagon show.²¹ The tour which brought the company to northwest Arkansas in 1851 marked the first recorded performance of this well-known circus in the region. If it entered from Missouri, it probably stopped in Benton and Washington Counties and then descended into the Arkansas River Valley. While there in all likelihood it performed at Fort Smith and probably also at Van

²⁰Ibid., December 5, 1851.

²¹Elbert R. Bowen, Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War (University of Missouri Studies, Vol. XXXII. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1959), p. 31.

Buren as was customary. The itinerary in a Little Rock paper stated that the circus appeared in Ozark, Clarksville, Dover, Norristown and Lewisburg on its way down the valley.²²

IV. DAN RICE'S MYTHICAL APPEARANCE IN ARKANSAS, 1853

According to his biography, written by Maria Ward Brown in 1901, Dan Rice made two trips into northwest Arkansas before the Civil War. The first was in the spring of 1852 when Rice traveled overland from Magnolia, in the southeast corner of the state, to Little Rock, to post the advertisements for his circus.²³ From Little Rock he supposedly went on up the Arkansas River and posted the towns as far as Van Buren. The newspapers of the period, however, make no mention of the possibility of Dan Rice's circus coming to any Arkansas town except Helena.²⁴ It is highly unlikely that the papers would ignore the imminent visit of such a far-famed clown and performer as Rice. The biography stated that the level of the river prohibited the circus from appearing.

The second trip was reportedly more successful and he was said not only to have played in Little Rock during the week of May 1, 1853,²⁵ but also to have ascended the river and played in Fort Smith

²²Little Rock Arkansas Banner, December 2, 1851.

²³Brown, op. cit., pp. 119-124.

²⁴Helena Southern Shield, April 3, 1852.

²⁵Brown, op. cit., p. 132.

and Van Buren. A lengthy description of the circus at Fort Smith follows. Neither of the papers in Little Rock mention Dan Rice during the 1850's, much less "during the week of May 1, 1853." It can only be assumed that in 1900, Rice, aged and senile, had confused his visit to the Arkansas River valley in the 1870's with the days when his success and fame were more pleasant to consider. Possibly there was a news blackout, but with a nationally famous clown such as Dan Rice, it is not likely.

V. G. N. ELRED'S GREAT ROTUNDA CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE, 1858

According to the Arkansas Gazette, G. N. Elred's Great Rotunda Circus and Menagerie, a wagon show, descended the Arkansas River Valley, playing at the valley towns in October, 1858.²⁶ The attractions consisted mainly of equestrian entertainers. In all probability Elred's show played at Fayetteville, Van Buren and Fort Smith, as well as the towns south to Little Rock. The circus was in Little Rock on October 25 and 26, 1858.²⁷

VI. SIGNOR DONETTI'S MONKEY CIRCUS, 1858

In December, 1858, the steamer Banjo came to northwest Arkansas for the second time.²⁸ While predominantly a minstrel show boat, on

²⁶Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, October 16, 1858.

²⁷Ibid., October 30, 1858.

²⁸Fort Smith Herald, December 25, 1858.

this trip it also carried a unique circus, Signor Carlos Donetti's Great Parisian Troupe of Acting Monkeys, Dogs, and Goats. This bizarre troupe had performed for one hundred consecutive nights in New York, and Spaulding and Rogers had made a permanent engagement with Signor Donetti.²⁹ In 1858 the animals traveled on both Spaulding and Roger's Banjo and their James Raymond. They also toured the upper Mississippi during 1858.³⁰

The editor of the Fort Smith Herald urged that the populace attend the performance of the monkeys, goats, and dogs, stating: "This is no humbug, for I have seen them and they can, and will do just what they say on their bills."³¹ The troupe stopped in Fort Smith on December 26 and 27, 1858, and played at other river towns on the way up and back down. In the Arkansas True Democrat an advertisement announced scheduled appearances at Lewisburg, Gally Rock, Dardanelle, Norristown, Spadra Bluff, Fort Smith, Van Buren, Ozark, and Roseville.³²

VII. THE CIRCUSES OF 1859

During the spring of 1859 the region saw two circuses vie for

²⁹John A. Dingess, "A History of the Circus in America," (Unpublished Manuscript, Herzberg Theatre Collection, San Antonio Public Library, San Antonio, Texas), p. 754.

³⁰Schick, "Early Showboats and Circus in the Upper Valley," Mid-America, XXXII (October, 1950), p. 221.

³¹Fort Smith Herald, December 25, 1858.

³²Little Rock True Democrat, December 15, 1858.

an audience in the towns and settlements. They were Mabie's Menagerie and Circus and The Caribow, Southern Menagerie and Varieties.

Mabie's Menagerie and Circus

Mabie's circus arrived first in Fort Smith on Monday, May 16, 1859.³³ It appeared at Evansville on May 19, Boonsboro on May 20, and Fayetteville on Saturday, May 21, 1859.³⁴ It is likely that it also played in Van Buren and other towns in the Arkansas River valley. The circus featured an elephant, the first to be advertised in this region. Up to this time the circuses had been composed mainly of equestrian acts. The performers included I. Huyck and Garry Demott, clowns. One of the announced events was "a grand procession in the forenoon of the day of exhibition preceded by the Musical Chariot drawn by elephants!"³⁵ The paper warned that this was designed to "induce to congregate together, at the proper time and place a large concourse of our citizens, composed of the gay and fickle as well as the grave and thoughtful."³⁶

The editor's prediction proved accurate for, after the appearance of the circus, the treasurer of the circus informed the editor that "the largest number of persons that visited them in Arkansas, he found at Fort Smith."³⁷

³³Fort Smith Times, May 19, 1859.

³⁴Fayetteville Arkansian, May 14 and 28, 1859.

³⁵Fort Smith Times, May 5, 1859.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., May 19, 1859.

³⁸Ibid.

The Caribow and the Great Southern Menagerie

The second circus was called The Caribow and the Great Southern Menagerie and Varieties, and it stopped in Fort Smith on May 17, 1859.³⁸ The featured varieties performers were Miss Vic Aken, sentimental singer and "danseuse," M'elle Nanna, a suspensionist and danseuse, Mago Del Oriente, a magician, and the Motly Brothers, "the greatest Ground Tumblers of the age."³⁹ The circus appeared in Fayetteville during the week of May 23 and was not very successful. In commenting on the sudden influx of circus entertainment, the Fayetteville Arkansian states:

We are humbugged too much--Last week we had Mable's Circus exhibiting to crowded houses, from city and country and as a people, were lessened in value five or six hundred dollars; and this week the air we have breathed, has been at times, made vocal by the soul-stirring music, the offspring of the "Variety Band" attached to the "One-Horse" exhibition called "Caribow." This concern is in every sense "one horse" commanding the services of but one "unfortunate" pony, and came near losing that, for Constable Taylor unceremoniously laid an attachment upon the back of the afore said pony; but to preserve the horse of the institution, the demand was liquidated. One redeeming feature, however, was the "learned" dogs, displaying almost as much sagacity as the big "dog" who exhibited them. It is but just to remark, that this Caribow was patronized - indeed an "organ-grinder" seldom fails to have a respectable hearing; and if he has a monkey, his success is rendered doubly sure.⁴⁰

Rivers and Derious Equestrian Dramatic Co.

In the fall of 1859 another circus advertised in the regional papers that it would exhibit. The Rivers and Derious Equestrian

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., May 5, 1859.

⁴⁰Ibid., May 28, 1859.

Dramatic Co. was scheduled at Fayetteville on September 1 and 2, Evansville on September 5, Natural Dam on September 6, Van Buren on September 7 and 8, Fort Smith on September 9 and 10, Mulberry on September 12, and Ozark on September 13.⁴¹ There is no indication in the press that this company fulfilled these dates. The circus performance was to conclude with the "Thrilling Equestrian Dramatic Spectacle of Mazeppa; or The Wild Horse of Tartary."⁴² If the circus came it presented that famous nineteenth century equestrian drama for the first time to the audiences of northwest Arkansas.

VIII. SUMMARY

The appearances of these circuses were doubtless events which were remembered by the populace for many years. Mark Twain has Huck Finn describe a circus in an Arkansas river town in Chapter XXII of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Huck was not one to pay for admission even though he had the money. He reasoned, "I ain't opposed to spending money on circuses when there ain't no other way, but there ain't no use in wasting it on them." His description of the circus might illustrate the impact which these glittering performances had on the awestruck audiences.

It was a real bully circus. It was the splndidest sight that ever was when they all come riding in, two and two, and gentlemen and lady, side by side, the men just in their drawers

⁴¹Fayetteville Arkansian, August 26, 1859; Van Buren Press, August 31, 1859; Fort Smith Times, September 1, 1859.

⁴²Fayetteville Arkansian, August 26, 1859.

and undershirts, and no shoes nor stirrups, and resting their hands on their thighs easy and comfortable--there must 'a' been twenty of them--and every lady with a lovely complexion, and perfectly beautiful, and looking just like a gang of real sure-enough queens, and dressed in clothes that cost millions of dollars, and just littered with diamonds. It was a powerful fine sight; I never see anything so lovely. And then one by one they got up and stood, and went a-weaving around the ring so gentle and wavy and graceful, the men looking ever so tall and airy and straight, with their heads bobbing and skimming along, away up there under the tent-roof, and every lady's rose-leafy dress flapping soft and silky around her hips, and she looking like the loveliest parasol.

.
Well, all through the circus they done the most astonishing things; and all the time that clown carried on so it most killed the people. The ringmaster couldn't ever say a word to him but he was back at him quick as a wink with the funniest things a body ever said; and how he ever could think of so many of them and so sudden and so pat, was what I couldn't no way understand. Why, I couldn't 'a' thought of them in a year.

.
I don't know; there may be bullier circuses than what that one was, but I never struck them yet. Anyways, it was plenty good enough for me; and wherever I run across it, it can have all of my custom every time.⁴³

The ten year space between the appearance of W. Waterman and Company's Circus in 1838 and the Rockwell and Company Circus in 1848 would reflect that circuses were the exception rather than the rule in northwest Arkansas. Both the G. N. Eldred and the Mabie Circus in 1851, the Monkey Circus on the Banjo in 1858, the return of Mabie's Menagerie and Circus, and the appearance of The Caribow, Southern Menagerie and Varieties in 1859 round out the roster of circus entertainment in the region between 1838 and the Civil War. The infrequency of circuses during this period was later compensated for by the increase of circus activity in the years following the war.

⁴³Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Chapter XXII.

CHAPTER IV

MINSTRELS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

While Negro acts had been established features in circuses and theatres for many years, "probably the first public presentation of what may be called a real minstrel show took place in the Bowery Amphitheatre in New York City, early in 1843."¹ This first group of four men called themselves the Virginia Minstrels and worked together rather than as individual performers.² The effect on the public was unprecedented. Within a few months minstrel shows were the rage in all American cities.³

The stereotyped minstrel show composed of "a middleman at the center, and two end men, one equipped with a pair of bones or castanets, and the other with a tambourine, sitting at the extremities of the semi-circle" developed rapidly. Olive Logan describes a typical minstrel troupe in the following manner:

The minstrels are seated across the stage in a row. They are a bright eyed, jolly voiced set of men all dressed in evening suits, with exaggerated shirt frills, monstrous Brummagem diamond pins, heavy watch chains, a great display of finger

¹Carl Wittke, Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 41.

²Ibid., pp. 44-45.

³Glenn Hughes, A History of The American Theatre, 1700-1950 (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 142.

rings. They are "blackened up," of course, and their teeth are as white and their lips as red from the contrast as those of genuine Negroes. Each man holds the instrument upon which he is a more or less proficient performer, ready to play and sing when his cue comes. They all rise and bow to the audience as the curtain ascends, and then they reseal themselves to begin the concert.⁴

I. THE NEW YORK ETHIOPEAN SERENADERS, 1845

A company calling themselves The New York Ethiopian Serenaders played in Van Buren during the week of May 5, 1845, and then went on up the river to Fort Smith and perhaps Fort Gibson.⁵ Reports do not state exactly what The New York Ethiopian Serenaders included in the Van Buren performance, but the following article from the Arkansas Intelligencer gives some indication of the impact the troupe had on the town and mentions some of the songs, dances, and "lectures," which were part of the performance.

THE ETHIOPEAN SERENADERS.--This "dark cloud" that has hovered o'er us, for the past week has at last blown off in the direction of Fort Smith.--It afforded considerable amusement, and delight to a large portion of our citizens, and caused no uneasiness among us, save a running about of some to raise "four bits" just about candle lighting every evening. They sing well, and are worthy of patronage; their songs are mostly new among us and are pleasing, and entertaining. Wall is inimitable in his dancing--Bones "can take the cakes." They will play a few nights at Fort Smith, and then proceed to Fort Gibson to enlighten the natives of that "Neck of Timber," with a few lectures upon the popular topics of the scientific world, and sing to them a few of their enlivening and laughable songs.

⁴Olive Logan, "The Ancestry of Brudder Bones," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LVIII (April, 1879), 686.

⁵Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, May 10, 1845.

They are entitled to confidence, for they paid the printer, and that's what all don't do.⁶

It is interesting to note that this was a new form of theatrical entertainment for the people in this relatively isolated section of the frontier. Yet, the troupe was able to play to a small river town for a week and make enough money to pay the printer.

II. AMATEUR MINSTRELS

A problem that occurred in the eastern theatre centers did not develop in this region of the Arkansas frontier. In the East, the minstrels practically took over the other forms of theatrical amusements.⁷ W. B. Wood, in his Personal Recollections of the Stage, states that in the early 1840's "Negro singers, Ethiopian serenaders, and such entertainments" were replacing the production of plays throughout the East.⁸ Since northwest Arkansas was barren of other theatres, the minstrels did not draw audiences away from the legitimate drama.

"Arkansas Minstrels," 1845

Minstrel type entertainment found a fertile breeding ground in the amateur performers of the period. The local Thespians in Van Buren felt the influence of the first professional minstrels and made no effort to return to their old fare of straight dramas and farces.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Wittke, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

⁸William B. Wood, Personal Recollections of the Stage (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird, 1855), p. 456.

Instead, in keeping with the nationwide vogue, the local group turned into a minstrel troupe. The following brief article from the Arkansas Intelligencer contains the sole notice of this transformation.

The Van Buren Thespians played on Thursday night last, to a full house. The "Arkansas Minstrels" made their debut and acquitted themselves exceedingly well, especially our young friend who rattled the bones.⁹

Whether the Van Buren Thespians continued to perform as a minstrel troupe is not known. The minstrel performance became one of the major types of amateur entertainment in the region in later years. To the Van Buren Thespians goes credit for the first recorded amateur minstrel performance in northwest Arkansas.

The Sable Brothers Minstrels, 1855-57

The next minstrel troupe of which there is any mention was another amateur group, this time in Fort Smith. The concluding number on a program at St. Ann's Academy in December, 1855, was by The Sable Minstrels, and included "a comic lecture on de luminaries ob dis world by Plato Sugg, esq."¹⁰

In 1857 a group calling themselves The Sable Brothers Minstrels appeared in April at Van Buren. Of this performance the editor of the Van Buren paper writes:

Whildst all that conduces to the inner man can be readily had, rare intellectual feasts are occasionally presented for the

⁹Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, July 5, 1845.

¹⁰Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, January 8, 1856.

enjoyment of those who delight therein. They delineated the Negro character to perfection.¹¹

Possibly these minstrels were the same amateur Sable Minstrels who performed in 1855 in Fort Smith. This is indicated by a reference to them as The Sable Brothers of Fort Smith.¹²

The troupe made a second appearance on Wednesday evening, April 29, 1857, and a report states that it entertained the citizens "with one of their Ethiopian concerts, to the delight of all present."¹³

III. SPAULDING AND ROGERS' SHOWBOAT, THE BANJO

Until 1857 no showboats had been reported on the river north of Little Rock. In the spring of 1857 this void was filled by the appearance of one of the best known showboats on the western rivers. Spaulding and Rogers' "elegant concert steamer," the Banjo, came to Van Buren, Fort Smith and other towns on the Arkansas River.

"Doctor" Gilbert R. Spaulding and his partner, Charles J. Rogers, were circus managers who operated showboats and circus boats in the 1850's. Their most famous boat was the Floating Palace, a giant barge which was towed by another of their showboats, the steam powered James Raymond. Occasionally these boats appeared in eastern Arkansas on the Mississippi.¹⁴ The Floating Palace carried a circus and could

¹¹Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, April 17, 1857.

¹²Ibid., May 1, 1857.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Helena Southern Shield, March 13, 1858.

seat thirty-four hundred.¹⁵ On the James Raymond "an elegant concert saloon, called the 'Ridotto,' featured dramatic performances, vaudeville and minstrel entertainments."¹⁶

In addition to these two boats, Spaulding and Rogers operated the comparatively small boat called the Banjo, which was built in 1855. Only 115 feet in length, the Banjo had a comfortable theatre seating an audience of eight hundred, and containing a spacious stage with adequate scenery.¹⁷

As the name might indicate, the Banjo carried a minstrel show, and the Ned Davis Minstrel Troupe was performing on the Banjo at this time. Davis' Minstrels was the original company to perform on the Banjo and was always popular wherever it went.¹⁸ This troupe played in Little Rock the week before it was in Fort Smith and Van Buren, and the Little Rock True Democrat praises the Davis Troupe warmly.

We cordially recommend this troupe to our friends above (up the river) and if they have been deceived lately by any of those humbug affairs that frequent the country, we would suggest that if they wish "to get their money back" they should apply to Ned Davis on board the Banjo.¹⁹

¹⁵Philip Graham, Showboats: The History of an American Institution (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 29.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁷Joseph S. Schick, "Early Showboat and Circus in the Upper Valley," Mid-America, XXXII (October, 1950, 220.

¹⁸Edward Leroy Rice, Monarchs of Minstrelsy, From "Daddy" Rice to Date (New York: Kenny Publishing Company, 1911), p. 366.

¹⁹Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, May 5, 1857.

This recommendation was not taken lightly, and the editor of the Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer echoes the praise. In an article entitled "Spaulding and Rogers Musical Troupe" the editor writes at length about his visit to the "little floating palace." It affords a rare first-hand look at the boat and the performance.

The steamer Banjo visited our city on her downward trip on Wednesday last. We had heard much of this little "floating palace" and her musical freight, and were blameless in indulging our curiosity which favorable report had excited. The result of our close examination of her will doubtless be appreciated by those of our readers who were not fortunate enough to make the same for themselves. We were met at the stair-way by the agent, Mr. Dingess, who had either been informed or knew instinctively that we were an editor. He immediately chalked our hat and signified a willingness to chalk our lady's to which last proposition we could not assent. We proceeded above stairs, and ascertained that she was made for gentlemen occupying our situation, that of a spectator, and was capable in her capacious and neatly finished hall of comfortably seating about nine hundred and ninety-nine others. The floor of the hall is highest at the greatest distance from the stage, and its greatest depression is nearest it. The stage raised about five feet above the floor, and somewhat above the most elevated part of it, is tastefully adorned with scenic paintings, and sufficiently large for the numerous band, who, when the curtain was lifted, appeared upon it facing us and in a semicircle. The performances of these Sable Brothers is of an exceedingly gratifying, amusing and unexceptionable character. The violinist is certainly second to none. We have in by gone days heard Ole Bull, and while we mean no disrespect to the dead, believe it to be a duty to do justice to the living. Saying that in our opinion they cannot be excelled is but a sentiment of truth and justice. We predict for these young men an enviable place in their profession--Of the others we can safely say that they acted well their parts, and are fine musicians. Their imitation and delineation of the Negro character, out niggers niggerdom itself. The "take-off" on woman's rights is well calculated to excite the risibles. [sic] The dancing is very good and perfectly in character. A Virginia "Hoedown" dancer might take lessons from these gentlemen and lose nothing. Madame Davis, appeared in the full dress of a danseuse, and in her display of the "light fantastic toe" a compliment was frequently "encored and called back." It is a source of gratification to us that a more deserving class of persons are favoring us

with their visits. The strictest order and decorum were preserved by the officers of this floating palace, and a more gentlemanly set of men it never was our lot to meet with.²⁰

The Banjo seemingly had no problems in Van Buren. This was not the case with other minstrel boats at some places in Arkansas. One of the minstrel performers on the Floating Palace and the James Raymond writes of his travels on Spaulding and Roger's boats.

The Palace and Raymond would sometimes run their noses upon the banks of some of these rivers where there was not a habitation in view, and by the hour of the exhibition the boats and shore would be thronged with people. In some places on the Mississippi, especially in Arkansas, men would come in with pistols sticking out of their coat-pockets, or with long bowie-knives protruding from the legs of their boots. The manager had provided for these savage people; for every member of the company was armed, and at a given signal, stood on the defensive. We had a giant for a door-keeper who was known in one evening to kick down stairs as many as five of these bush-whackers with drawn knives in their hands.²¹

There is no indication that Keeler traveled into northwest Arkansas; however, it is not too presumptuous to imagine that the Banjo fared no better at some points on the Arkansas River.

The Banjo returned to Fort Smith in December of the following year with both a monkey circus and a minstrel troupe aboard.²² In December, 1859, another visit to Fort Smith was announced, but the boat turned back at Little Rock and did not fulfill its engagements up river.

²⁰Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, May 8, 1857.

²¹Ralph Keeler, "Three Years as a Negro Minstrel," Atlantic Monthly, XXXIV (July, 1869), 81.

²²Fort Smith Herald, December 25, 1858.

IV. MINSTRELS IN 1858

Wright and Bingham's Negro Minstrels

On April 16, 1858, the Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer carried a news article which stated that Wright and Bingham's "world renowned company" of Negro Minstrels was to give a performance on the night of the sixteenth and again the following evening. This was to be one of "their grand unique and chaste entertainments." The performance was to have taken place in the Smith House.²³ Whether the company appeared or not is not recorded.

The National Minstrels

The same issue of the Intelligencer stated that The National Minstrels, with a superb brass band led by Ed Temple, and a quadrille band let by H. D. Kirk, were to perform at the Courthouse on the evening of April 19, 1858.²⁴ The minstrel troupe headed by G. W. Foster and A. D. Scott was to furnish the rich, rare and spicy entertainment for the citizens of Van Buren. Again there is no record of a performance.

If both of these companies came to Van Buren (and there is nothing to indicate that they did not), they probably performed up the river at Fort Smith and in other river towns to the south.

²³Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, April 16, 1858.

²⁴Ibid.

V. SUMMARY

None of the minstrel troupes which appeared in northwest Arkansas before the Civil War, except perhaps for those on board the Banjo, seem to have any reputation in the other parts of the country. The New York Ethiopian Serenaders in 1845, and Wright and Bingham's company and The National Minstrels in 1858 do not appear in any of the standard works on minstrelsy. A minstrel company was probably easy to put together, but a reputation was difficult to establish, especially in rather remote northwest Arkansas. The amateur performances in 1845 and the other efforts in 1855 and 1857, marked the beginning of that favorite form of amateur effort, which has only recently become dormant, the amateur minstrel show.

After the war both forms of minstrels thrived in the region, and their appearance at nearly every town in the area became commonplace.

CHAPTER V

AMATEUR DRAMATIC ACTIVITY BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

Amateur dramatic activity was one of the first refinements of the frontier towns. Before the end of the eighteenth century amateur theatricals were presented in Lexington, Kentucky.¹ In the nineteenth century the amateur thespian societies, as they were called, were common throughout the frontier settlements. In many instances these amateur societies served as forerunners of an active professional theatre. The purpose of this chapter is to present the development of amateur dramatic activity in the region prior to the Civil War.

I. AMATEUR EFFORTS IN RELATED AREAS

Due to the slow development of population centers, northwest Arkansas was late in discovering the amateur theatrical performance. In adjacent areas amateur efforts began much earlier than the 1844 date of the first Thespian Society in the region.

Fort Gibson, Indian Country, 1830

The earliest known theatrical performance in the Arkansas River Valley was at Fort Gibson, which was located some sixty miles northwest of Fort Smith in what was then called Indian Country. Cantonement

¹Ralph Leslie Rusk, The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), I, 352.

Gibson, as it was referred to then, was the busiest of the western forts and ordinarily contained the largest complement of men.² Amateur theatricals were common at the western forts where they relieved the monotony of military routine.³ Women were excluded from the boards and the men "donned their wives' clothes and squeaked the female parts with more ardor than artistry."⁴

The Arkansas Gazette contains the following letter from Cantonment Gibson, dated August 23, 1830.

The Thespian Dramatic Corps, made the first opening on the evening of the 18th August. The entertainments consisted of Recitations, Songs, etc., and concluded with the farce of the Blue Devils.

We must say, that upon the whole the performances went off much better than we possibly could have imagined. We have seen worse attempts on regular boards. Great praise is due the soldiers of the Dramatic Corps, for their exertions and their endeavors to please. The scenery is excellent and the characters were dressed well, and with effect.⁵

Because of the success of the first performance there was another the following month.⁶

The First Theatrical Performance in Little Rock, 1834

The first chronicled theatrical performance in Arkansas took place in Little Rock two years before Arkansas became a state. On

²Robert E. Riegel, America Moves West (n.p.: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. 318.

³Ibid., p. 319.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, September 8, 1830.

⁶Walter Moffatt, "First Theatrical Activities in Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XII (Winter, 1953), p. 327.

November 4, 1834, a newly organized amateur group called the Little Rock Thalian Society presented The Soldier's Daughter by Andrew Cherry. The play was successful enough to warrant a repeat performance the following night with the afterpiece called Raising the Wind. The group closed the brief season with She Stoops to Conquer and a farce called Who's the Dupe.⁷

II. EARLY AMATEUR THEATRICALS IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

Fort Smith

Because of the location of the military post, Fort Smith was the scene of considerably more social life than would ordinarily be found in a frontier city of its size. Generals Edmund Pendleton Gaines, Albert Sidney Johnston, Jefferson Davis, C. A. Cody, W. W. Lear, W. W. S. Bliss, and Montgomery Pike Harrison were just a few of the frequent visitors to the Garrison and to the city.⁸ In 1841 General Zachary Taylor went from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Fort Smith, and took charge of the Department of the Southwest. General Taylor was there until 1845, when he left for the Mexican War.⁹ The social and intellectual level of the early settlers around the fort, as well

⁷Denham Lee Wooten, "Annals of the Stage in Little Rock Arkansas, 1834-1890," (unpublished Master's thesis, Columbia University, New York City, 1935), p. 3.

⁸J. Fred Patton, "History of Fort Smith, Arkansas," (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1836), p. 26.

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

as the influence of the officers and their wives who lived on the post, "gave to the early social life of the town a charm and dignity rarely found outside the centers of wealth and culture."¹⁰

This influence was evident in theatrical activities, for in the first half of the 1840's a little thespian society was organized at the fort. The exact date is now known, for no newspapers were published in Fort Smith until the Fort Smith Herald was started by John F. Wheeler, in June, 1847.¹¹ Fortunately, the effort of amateurs to produce Loan of a Lover in 1882 prompted the editor of Wheeler's Independent to recall the earliest thespian society and its attempt at the same play. The account is here quoted in full.

About 40 years ago a little Thespian society was started in Fort Smith by the young men to while away the tedium of a dull frontier town. We secured an old frame warehouse in the Garrison grounds, fitted it with stage and sets and painted some curtains and scenery with lampblack and yellow ochre. We had an orchestra from Gen. Taylor's military band (the musical performances were the best part of the entertainment). The first drama offered was the "Loan of a Lover," and the after-piece, "Kiss in the Dark," with the following caste: Fred Montgomery, manager and prompter; Joseph Walton, Peter Spyk; Socrates Darby as Swyzie; Capt. Amesfort by a citizen. As we had no young ladies to assist us, we had to dress up George Smith for Gertrude and George Ingalls for Ernestine. Smith was a handsome young man, sang very well and looked all right in his short tarletan market dress, we had to plaster flour very thick on Ingall's to hide his rough beard, and being very stout, we had much trouble in borrowing a gown large enough for him. Everything went off first rate with a rousing house. We were patronized by all the officers of the Garrison and their ladies and the elite of the town (which didn't count more than two

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹¹ Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 857.

dozen houses). There was no room within for the canille but they crowded the outside, encored the fine passages with yells and screams, and went down town after the performance and got drunk at Tom Oates' cabaret. We might refer with pride to some of the audience who attended that night and good naturedly applauded our boyish dramatics, and beat time with their heels on the dry goods box seats. Some of them have since filled the highest positions, both civil and military and are prominent in the country's history.¹²

The mention of General Taylor's Military band would place the date of this amateur performance between 1841 and 1845.¹³ It could well have been this same group that a Van Buren paper called The Fort Smith Thespian Corps in 1844 and 1845.¹⁴ If the "forty years ago" mentioned in the article is accurate, then the thespian society is the first recorded active amateur group in northwest Arkansas. Amateur theatricals were not an unusual occurrence at the early frontier forts.¹⁵

Van Buren

The next theatrical activity in the region was at the thriving river town of Van Buren, just down the river from Fort Smith. At the end of June, 1844, the Arkansas Intelligencer tells of the preparations for the coming Fourth of July which were to "make suitable demonstrations of the 69th anniversary of American Independence."¹⁶ The celebration

¹²Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, May 3, 1882.

¹³Patton, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁴Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, September 28, 1844; March 1, 1845.

¹⁵Riegel, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁶Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, June 29, 1844.

was to include the firing of salutes, a procession, the delivery of an oration, and "the reading of the declaration."¹⁷ The article continues:

On the night of the 3d, the Thespian Corps of this place, by way of beginning the festivities, will offer at their debut, the admirable drama, entitled "William Tell," and the "Lottery Ticket." From our acquaintance with the gentlemen who will perform upon this occasion, and a knowledge of the trouble and expense which they have taken; the performance will go off well, and the company who are invited to attend will be well entertained, and will be well repaid for their attention.¹⁸

An advertisement in the same issue of the paper states that the presentation of William Tell, or The Hero of Switzerland was to be the Thespian Corp's "first night's performance,"¹⁹ an indication that this was a new organization. The advertisement further states that "an opening address, written by A. M. Scott, Esq., and dedicated to the Society, will be delivered." The evening was to conclude with the farce, The Lottery Ticket, or The Lawyer's Clerk. The doors were to be opened at seven-thirty in the evening and the curtain to rise at eight o'clock. The price of admission was advertised at fifty cents, children half price and a "box book" was made available on Tuesday, July 2, so that whole families could procure seats for the performance.²⁰

The editor of the Arkansas Intelligencer urged the citizens to give the association their patronage and encouragement because the purpose of the organization was to afford "amusement to the citizens,

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

of refining and improving the taste of the young men, and for benevolent purposes."²¹

The following Saturday, the paper gave a review of the play. The editor followed a common practice of lavishing praise on this local enterprise. He says:

Our expectations and the anticipations of all our citizens were most agreeably disappointed on Wednesday night. The house which has been fitted up by the "Thespians"--all, appointments, scenes, fixtures, &c., far surpassed our suppositions; although we had been prepared to expect much from the taste and industry of the young men engaged in this intellectual and laudable enterprise. . . . The whole piece was exceedingly well "done up"--every member had committed his part, understood it and delivered it forcibly. . . . It is not our intention to give a criticism on the merits of the performances, but merely to assure our readers who did not attend that they would have lost nothing, and also to inform them that by special request the society has consented to repeat the same pieces this evening.²²

The location of the group's theatre is never mentioned. The "Corps" continued to play intermittently for the next several months. The editor was not diligent in reviewing the subsequent performances. The Thespian Corps was scheduled to perform Pizarro, or the Death of Rolla, by Kotzebu and a farce entitled The Two Wives, or Hints to Husbands, on the evening of August 3, 1844.²³ Later that year, the club bought space in the paper to thank the Fort Smith Thespian Corps "for their kindness in volunteering their services on Wednesday evening last."²⁴

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., July 6, 1844.

²³Ibid., August 3, 1844.

²⁴Ibid., September 28, 1844.

In February of the following year, the paper reports a performance by the amateurs on Saturday, February 15, 1845, and promises another on the night of February 22. The editor praises the thespians for contributing "no little to the merriment of our citizens during these very dull times."²⁵ This performance was reportedly made interesting because of the appearance of "some splendid scenes, painted by J. M. Stanley, Esq."²⁶

The following Saturday the paper again commends the thespians for their efforts on the evening of February 22, 1845.

The Thespians performed unusually well on last Saturday night; the house was well filled, and the pieces selected gave general satisfaction. We were glad to see that our citizens were so well pleased with the new "act drop," painted by the talented artist, Mr. Stanley. It is a rich and beautiful scene, and does great credit to the genius of this excellent painter.²⁷

J. M. Stanley, Esq., has the distinction of being the first scene painter on record for this region of the state of Arkansas.

In this second performance, as in the one in September of 1844, the Van Buren Thespians were assisted by the Fort Smith Thespian Corps, and an advertisement carried in the paper expressed thanks for the assistance.²⁸

The two amateur groups of the decade of the 1840's for northwest Arkansas were the Van Buren Thespians and the Fort Smith Thespian Corps. While the newspaper accounts and records of their performances

²⁵Ibid., February 22, 1845.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., March 1, 1845.

²⁸Ibid.

are very scarce, they still must be given credit for the establishment of amateur theatrical entertainment in the region.

III. AMATEUR EFFORTS AT THE SCHOOLS

The next recorded effort by amateurs was the presentation of a one-act play by a school group in Fort Smith.

St. Anne's Academy Amateurs, 1855

A letter from Fort Smith dated December 21, 1855, appeared in the Arkansas True Democrat in Little Rock in January, 1856, and stated that St. Anne's Academy presented a play as part of an evening of entertainment.²⁹ The entertainment was given on the campus of the academy, in a hall which seated nearly two hundred persons. The performance occurred on a "temporary stage" located in one end of the hall.

The play presented was The Irish Tutor, and the cast consisted of all girls. This was a distinct break with the other thespian activities in which women were not allowed on the stage. "All the characters were very well supported, and the performance gave entire satisfaction to those who witnessed it."³⁰ The entertainment concluded with numerous musical numbers and an amateur minstrel troupe.

In reflecting on the evening, the letter writer reminisces and records the following thoughts:

²⁹Little Rock True Democrat, January 8, 1856.

³⁰Ibid.

We could not help but look back to our own schoolboy experiences, when on an occasion of the kind we had to commit some hackneyed "selected piece for declamation" or an insipid poem and deliver it in a sing song sort of style, without being able to understand it ourselves or make it intelligible to others. What a pleasing reflection, too, for the lover of his race and country to think that here, almost on the confines of civilization, and where, too, but a few years back the wild mustang ranged undisturbed and the buffalo reigned undisputed monarch of the forest--to find Children exhibiting a degree of mental culture and undertaking the delineation of character--an evidence of intelligence, which half a century back was regarded as the acme of learning.³¹

One-act plays were frequently a part of the closing exercises of schools and academies and, although none were recorded prior to this time, other amateur presentations of this kind probably occurred.

Miss Butler's Female Academy, 1858

In June, 1858, the young ladies of Miss Butler's Female Academy in Van Buren, "assisted by Mr. George W. Scott of Newport, Kentucky," presented The Flower Queen. On the evenings of June 11 and 12 the Presbyterian Church of Van Buren was crowded with spectators to witness the performance on a stage "erected and adorned with considerable labor, fine taste and skill," which represented with its surroundings of evergreens and flowers, "'a secluded dell,' where the flowers met to select their queen."³²

The review which appeared in the paper states that the actresses "reflected credit upon themselves and none who did not evince that

³¹Ibid.

³²Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, June 18, 1858.

perfect mastery of their parts, which can only result from long practice and study."³³ The "Rose" and the "Touch Me Not" were singled out as having acted their parts well. The audience "frequently manifested their approbation by well timed applause."³⁴

The Flower Queen was a play which gave ample opportunity for mothers to dress their daughters as the lavish flowers they imagined them to be. The production was the first effort of any of the amateurs at spectacle on such a level of fantasy.

During the period from 1859 to 1861 considerable professional activity appeared in the region. At times the amateur talent of the towns would join with the professionals and present joint efforts. In 1861 a club calling itself The Fort Smith Thespian Club was organized, and in conjunction with Nick Moroney, the manager of the Fort Smith Theater, presented several plays during the year. Because of the lack of information, it is difficult to separate the amateurs from the professionals. This venture is discussed at some length in the chapter "The Professional Dramatic Performances Before the Civil War."

IV. SUMMARY

The amateur theatrical efforts of the citizens of northwest Arkansas before the Civil War were not extensive. All of the recorded activity occurred in Fort Smith and Van Buren. Other towns of the region probably had amateur performances which were not recorded, or

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

of which the reports are no longer extant. The formation of the Fort Smith Thespian Corps and the Van Buren Thespian Corp in 1844 marked the first efforts toward amateur theatrical performances in the region. The two school efforts of the 1850's were significant only in that they were typical events in the school year of the academies of the region. The period just prior to the Civil War found the amateurs almost inseparable from the professional theatre in that they were evidently managed by Nick Moroney, the professional manager of the Fort Smith Theatre. The years following the war presented an entirely different picture, for the growth of amateur groups was extensive and varied, a contrast to the rare reports of the pre-war decades.

CHAPTER VI

AMUSEMENTS AND ENTERTAINMENTS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

Like other settlers of the frontier regions, residents of northwest Arkansas felt the need for some forms of social entertainment to fill up the rare moments of leisure which they enjoyed. Sometimes these amusements took the form of purely social gatherings, but these were seldom recorded. Others took the form of "educational or cultural amusements." The purpose of this chapter is to chart the amusements and entertainments which are on record for the region prior to the Civil War. Because of the characteristics of many of these entertainments, they were ignored by the press. For this reason and because of the numerous years for which there are no extant newspapers, the listing of these events is very scattered.

I. EARLY SOCIAL LIFE OF THE SETTLERS

Because of their remoteness to centers of population, the early settlers created their own entertainments. The social life of the settlers was similar to other pioneer periods in purpose as well as in procedure. Typical of the social life were the house-raisings. These were followed by house-warmings, consisting of dancing "the Virginia reel, the stately minuet, or the old fashioned cotillion, in which

someone called the figures in a stentorian voice . . ."¹ One of the early settlers in Washington County describes the early social life there in the following folksy manner:

"Hoe-downs" and reels--"None o'yer huggin' dances"--were tripped lightly, and with jollity, to the tune of "Roarin' River," etc., which some deft musicians drew from the gourd "fiddle" with its horse-hair strings and bow, and the gourd banjo with its squirrelskin head and horse hairs. "We had debatin' sasieties too--bony-fide (bona fide) debatin'," said "Uncle An" (the early settler). "Pursuit and Possession," "Art and Nature," and "Which would a man go further fur--Money 'er his best gurl?" were passed upon, and when it came time to walk home with some bright-eyed lass, "we walked a lettles ways off," said "Uncle An," "We didn't clevis arms us they do now!"²

The log-rolling and the quilting-bee were other forms of social life in which the pioneers participated. The quilting-bee was generally followed by a dance. "Young women thought nothing of riding on horseback twenty miles to attend one of these parties, dancing untill the 'wee sma' hours and then, accompanied by her sweetheart, riding home in time to do a day's work."³

Other events that were a part of the life of the frontier were shooting matches and various sports. Horse racing, especially, was popular among the men. In 1838 Batesville, Little Rock, Van Buren, Fayetteville, and Fort Smith had race tracks and jockey clubs.⁴

¹Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: The S. J. Clark Publishing Company, 1922), I, 201.

²History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889), pp. 148-49.

³Herndon, op. cit., p. 213.

⁴Boyd W. Johnson, The Arkansas Frontier (n.p.: c. 1957), p. 162.

Because of the popularity of racing, great crowds flocked to the tracks. Even at an early date, a small town like Fort Smith attracted great crowds from other states. The Fort Smith Jockey Club was composed mainly of prominent citizens of Van Buren and Fort Smith. Generally numerous tents housing the visitors appeared at the race track. The soldiers from the fort, the Indians from Indian Territory, and all elements of society made quite a cosmopolitan crowd.⁵

II. VISITING LECTURERS

The popularity of the lecturer during the nineteenth century led Edward P. Hingston to write:

America is a lecture hall on a very extensive scale. The rostrum extends in a straight line from Boston, through New York and Philadelphia to Washington. There are raised seats on the first tier in the Alleghanies, and the gallery accommodations on the top of the Rocky Mountains.⁶

He observes further that the lecturer is indigenous to the American soil, for each citizen feels that he is a repository of extensive information; and "within him is the pent-up source of knowledge; his amiable spirit of benevolence prompts him to let it flow for the enlightenment of his benighted fellow citizens, and the outer world of darkness generally."⁷

⁵Fort Smith Elevator, October 14, 1898.

⁶Edward P. Hingston, The Genial Showman, Being Reminiscences of the Life of Artemus Ward (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1870), p. 42.

⁷Ibid.

The reported appearance of lecturers in northwest Arkansas was rare before the Civil War. The region was somewhat remote and an effort to go there had to be made because there was little to attract the lecturer to Indian Territory.

The Lectures of J. N. Maffitt, 1849

In 1849 a new form of entertainment appeared in Van Buren: the visiting lecturer. Professor, or Reverend J. N. Maffitt came to Van Buren where he lectured and preached for nearly the whole month of February.

Maffitt had at one time been Professor of Elocution and Belles Lettres at St. Charles College, Missouri.⁸ In 1847 the Little Rock Banner carried a number of articles on Maffitt which seemed to indicate that he had some notoriety in the East.⁹ The Banner answers one of the news items with the following statement:

This certainly is not the first time, to our own knowledge that this talented divine has suffered suspicions unworthy of his clerical character from many of the most respectable members of his own denomination.¹⁰

The following year he appeared in Little Rock and other Arkansas towns as a lecturer and preacher.¹¹

In Van Buren some of Rev. Maffitt's lecture topics were:

⁸Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, April 21, 1841.

⁹Little Rock Arkansas Banner, May 19, June 14 and June 21, 1847.

¹⁰Ibid., June 21, 1847.

¹¹Ibid., February 15, August 22, September 12, 1848.

"Woman as She Was, Is, and Should Be;" "American and French Revolutions;" "Eloquence;" "All Mighty Dollar;" "Life of Genius;" and "The Glory of Mechanism." The author of the following review must have listened to Maffitt's lecture on "Eloquence" before writing:

Our opinion of this gifted orator's sermons, was frankly given in our last. Since then we have enjoyed the ecstatic delight of listening to his lectures. The latter exceeded the former in overpowering and sublime thought, in beauty of language and symmetry of subject. His audience are electrified by the sublimity and grandeur of his flights, charmed and transfixed to their seats in earnest attention, whilst dwelling upon his elegant diction, rich illustration, brilliant imagery and utterance of noble sentiments. . . . His mind appears to be a perfect Golconda of wealth, a storehouse of dazzling gems. His gestures, attitudes, modulations, are natural, easy and appropriate.¹²

The writer also mentions that some "invidious persons" were trying to make it look as though Mr. Maffitt were preaching and lecturing just for the money. This charge could not be true, the writer reasons, for if he had been just interested in the money, he would have confined "his labors to more populous countries and flourishing cities," and lectured all of the time. Instead Maffitt is characterized as a lecturer with a mission who had come to "the wilderness of young Arkansas" where he was called by his Christian brethren. The writer ends his defense with: "No, a man of his gifted mind have a sordid soul?"¹³

The skepticism of the audience seems to have been common in

¹²Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, February 10, 1849.

¹³Ibid.

the West. Olive Logan, the actress and lecturer, writing in 1870, says:

Of all audiences in the world, I think, the Western audience is keenest alive to humbug. It scents it from afar. It will have none of it. Why it is that the impression prevails in New York that Western audiences are not critical, that they go into boisterous exclamations of delight over coarse and vulgar performances, is quite inexplicable to me. As a rule, New York audiences are far less difficult to please than those of the west, when the performance is of an intellectual character.¹⁴

Her observations continue with an evaluation of the Western audience's tastes in regard to lecture content. "It is clear then that the comic element is least attractive to Western audiences; pathos is appreciated by them; but above all attractions the most attractive is that which furnishes information of a valuable sort. Never was known a people more hungry for knowledge."¹⁵ The topics which Professor Maffitt discussed would indicate that Olive Logan was correct.

Maffitt was always greeted by large and enthusiastic audiences composed of the town's "most intelligent and respectable citizens."¹⁶ While a present day audience might not feel that this type of lecturer could be taken seriously, it is representative, however, of the entertainments which were supported by what is sometimes called "the better

¹⁴Olive Logan, Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes (Philadelphia: Parmelee & Company, 1870), pp. 477-78.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 478.

¹⁶Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, February 24, 1849.

element" who tried to wage "a persistent warfare against the disintegrating forces which the liberty of a wild country unloosed,"¹⁷

Lecture on Phrenology, 1849

A second lecturer who appeared in Van Buren that year will be only briefly mentioned. In November Mr. J. Anton was reported to be giving lectures on "The Science of Phrenology." Anton lectured four times a week for three weeks. The editor of the Arkansas Intelligencer was quite impressed with his "science."¹⁸ Phrenology, a method of "revealing" character traits and mental faculties through an examination of the skull, experienced great popularity in the nineteenth century.

III. AN EARLY HUMBUG, THE LEARNED PIG, 1849

In July of 1849 a phenomenon appeared in Fayetteville, which was quickly labeled as a "Humbug," an exhibition which demonstrated the talents of an animal billed as "The Learned Pig." The Van Buren paper, hearing of the occurrence, writes: "A more vulgar, senseless humbug never was perpetrated upon an intelligent community. The boys at Fayetteville came near mobbing the whole swinish herd."¹⁹

When the attraction arrived in Van Buren in August the paper

¹⁷Louis B. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 12.

¹⁸Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, November 17, 1849.

¹⁹Ibid., July 14, 1849.

notes that it played to only about a dozen spectators, the editor being one of those. Seeing the performance in person did not soften the editor's attitude toward the show and he pronounces it "the most non-sensical thing ever exhibited; incapable of interesting any but children and Negroes."²⁰

As the region became more accessible, more of this sort of "humbug" would come to entertain those who preferred "humbugs" to reality.

IV. EARLY MAGICIANS

Because of the nature of the magician's craft, this was one of the frequent amusements on the frontier. Bowen found that the earliest magician in rural Missouri was in 1847,²¹ and was followed by many others through the years before the Civil War. Few magicians came to northwest Arkansas before the Civil War, and only one accurate report of a performance by a magician exists. Another report, perhaps not based on fact, completes the roster of early magicians.

Mr. Dalton, Magician, 1851

The first theatrical event of the decade of the 1850's was the appearance of a magician named Dalton in March, 1851. The Fort Smith

²⁰Ibid., August 11, 1849.

²¹Elbert R. Bowen, Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War (University of Missouri Studies, Vol. XXXII, Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1959), p. 12.

Herald makes only scant mention of it.

Mr. Dalton, will give another of their [sic] entertainly [sic] and laughable exhibitions of Hindoo Miracles, etc.--Those who attended last evening pronounce it good. Be sure and attend this evening, as they will have a change of performance.²²

The length of stay, the place of performance, and the number of people in the company are not stated in the brief article.

A Slight of Foot Performance

There is a chance that another magician came before this time. In an article, which was clipped from a Fort Smith newspaper of unknown date, is a tale told by an "Old Timer" relating what occurred when the first "slight of hand" performer visited Fort Smith. The front room of Squire Moore's boarding house was the setting for the show, and a platform and curtain were improvised. The first appearance failed to please the audience and they manifested their disappointment in no uncertain terms. The "Old Timer" relates:

Observing the discontent, the magician announced that owing to the fact that his performance had not met with general approval he would on the following evening redeem himself, for the small admission price of 25 cents, by presenting what was never attempted before in America or Europe, a "slight of feet" performance. The novelty of the announcement appeased the sour tempers of the populace and the "slight of feet" performance was waited for with impatient expectancy.

Again a packed room greeted the magician on the second night. He was seen to go behind the curtain, but did not make his appearance on schedule time. The audience became restless and shouts and cat-calls emanated from the different parts of the hall demanding commencement of the slight of feet show. I was a small boy then and of course occupied a seat on the front row of chairs. Sitting on my right side was Sam Edmonson's father. As the

²²Fort Smith Herald, March 21, 1851.

impatient yells became louder and more frequent Col. Edmonson walked to the platform and jerked back the curtain to learn the cause of delay. To the dismay of all, and especially to my own chagrin and disgust, nothing but the bare wall and an open window met our gaze. The magician had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up and as he had taken our money at the door of the hall himself, it, of course, had vanished with him. Shouts of "catch him!" "Shoot him!" "Lynch him!" were heard on all sides, but old man Edmonson remained calm. Finally managing to be heard he said: "Don't make bigger fools of yourselves boys. The Magician has done just exactly what he bargained to do, gave us a slight of feet performance. He has duped us all nicely and is doubtless ten miles away from town by now. Let's go home and take our medicine like men."²³

The story may be apocryphal or based on an actual incident. It is, nonetheless, an interesting recounting of what must have happened many times on the American frontier. The label, "Humbug," was justly applied to many such performers, and the bad reputation which resulted was not easily overcome by more reputable entertainers.

V. EDITOR'S VIEW OF SHOWMEN

Not long after the appearance of Mr. Dalton's brief visit, the Fort Smith Herald contained a brief comment which exemplifies the attitude of many Arkansas newspaper editors of this period. An article, copied from another paper, entitled "Wealth of Showmen" is in the paper in April, 1851, and makes the point that Barnum, Edwin Forrest, Moses Kimball, Jenny Lind, and other "showmen" had made \$2,670,000 in the ten years prior to that date. Mr. John Wheeler, the editor of the Herald, comments:

²³From an old Newspaper clipping, date and source unknown, located in Volume IX, p. 21, "The Weaver Scrapbooks," on microfilm at the University of Arkansas Library.

How many honest hard-working mechanics, can boast of having realized such fortunes as any of those mentioned above? Showmen, however, who never labor, can boast of their thousands, all made by tickling the fancy of the public. Verily, this is an age of humbuggery.²⁴

In later years, when "humbugs" ascended the river to the region, the editors often echo the attitude reflected in this article and frequently point out the "humbuggery" of traveling shows reminiscent of the Learned Pig in 1849.

VI. A VARIETY TROUPE

Toward the end of the decade other amusements came to northwest Arkansas. In August, 1859, the Fort Smith Times carried an advertisement for the Fitzgibbons Burlesque Opera Troupe, which was to include Messrs. C. Payne, S. M. Irwin (formerly of the Fort Smith Theatre), P. Jones, R. L. Spinks, R. W. Wilcox, Baker, and J. Hackett. It was scheduled to perform on the evenings of August 18, 19, and 20, 1859. The advertisement indicated that many of the men had previously been with a minstrel troupe, and the whole company was to "appear in a pleasing lot of songs, dances, Banjo Solos, Reels, Jigs, Duets, Burlesques, etc., etc."²⁵ Some time later Wilcox came to Fayetteville with the Mulholland and Huntley Company.²⁶

²⁴Fort Smith Herald, April 11, 1851.

²⁵Fort Smith Times, August 18, 1859.

²⁶Fayetteville Arkansian, October 28, 1859.

VII. ALF HOWARD, THE GREAT AMERICAN VIOLINIST, 1860

The next event on record is the appearance of Alf Howard, a violinist, who advertised himself as "the only successful rival to the great Ole Bull." His advertisement had been in the paper for some months, but due to bad weather he had been unable to get to Fort Smith. He arrived in February and rented Moroney's theatre for one of his "unique concerts" on the evening of February 2, 1860.²⁷ The reception ~~or~~ success of this concert is not reported.

VIII. THE FIRST BALLOON ASCENSION

In March, 1860, the first balloon ascension on record for Fort Smith occurred. The "Ericsson and Hydrogen Balloon Company!" gave one exhibition of this novel form of entertainment. Alas, instead of encouraging air travel, a disaster occurred. A vivid description is carried in the Times.

On Friday last, about 5 [sic] the Balloon, which was advertised, to go up on that day, after being inflated with hot air ascended. We never witnessed such a thing before, and we watched the process with considerable anxiety. After it was announced that all things were ready, Mr. Schotts, stepped into the car, and the balloon was cut loose, and it ascended beautifully. The day was very calm, and the atmosphere filled with smoke, like Indian Summer. The Balloon after remaining up a minute or two, without going any distance commenced descending rather rapidly and fell in the river, and Mr. S. had to swim to a snag with the balloon, and hold it there until a skiff was taken to him, and he was brought to shore. The balloon was rent so much by the concussion, in striking the water, that the company could not make an ascension in Van Buren. Mr. Kenney, the principal in the matter,

²⁷ Fort Smith Times, February 2, 1860.

informed us that they did not pay expenses, and we believe it is true, as but few of the spectators were inside the tent. We believe more could have been raised by subscription. For our own part, we were pleased with the ascension.²⁸

Such occurrences could not have promoted any optimism in the possibilities of future air travel.

IX. DR. KANE'S ARCTIC EXPEDITION; PANORAMA, 1860

In April and May, 1860, one of the more curious forms of theatrical entertainments of the nineteenth century made its debut in northwest Arkansas. A panorama entitled, "Dr. Kane's Arctic Expedition," appeared in Fort Smith under the ownership of Mr. W. H. Paul.²⁹ An exhibition of this sort was quite common at many of the more accessible towns in the Mississippi Valley as well as in the older cities in the East. The panorama was a form of spectacle much enjoyed by the American people in the nineteenth century. Ordinarily the panorama was a large canvass or series of canvasses which were hung so that they completely surrounded the audience. These "works of art" were lighted from the front and afforded the audience a continuous but nonchanging picture of the particular subject.³⁰

Dr. Kane's Arctic Expedition Panorama appeared in Missouri in 1860 also.³¹ It was known down the river at Little Rock and at Memphis.

²⁸Ibid., March 22, 1860.

²⁹Ibid., April 19, 1860.

³⁰Richard Moody, America Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 219.

³¹Bowen, op. cit., p. 16.

Mr. Paul managed to win the support of the citizens of Fort Smith by giving a benefit showing of his panorama for the "Fort Smith Rifles," the first company of volunteer troops. Included on the program was the Brass Band which "acquitted themselves in a masterly manner--giving entire satisfaction." The panorama was said to be "unsurpassed by anything we have ever seen in Arkansas. . . ."32

There are indications that another panorama was in the region in March, 1861. The Arkansas Gazette records a panorama in Little Rock of "remarkable places in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa."33 The manager, Mr. Grace, announced that he planned to go from Little Rock to Fort Smith, and it is quite likely that the panorama did come to the town even though the report of it is not extant.

X. SUMMARY

The remoteness of the region and the uncertainties of frontier travel certainly held down the number of other entertainments. In addition to the common frontier amusements and the horse racing, the citizens of northwest Arkansas had an opportunity to hear a nationally "famous" lecturer and divine in the form of Professor J. N. Maffitt. They had a chance to sample the field of learning called "Phrenology." A magician in the early 1850's filled the void found in that field of entertainment, and the region also received at least one good "humbug"

³²Fort Smith Times, May 10, 1860.

³³Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, March 16, 1861.

in the "learned pig." The balloon ascension (and unexpected descent) gave the citizenry something to marvel at for years to come, and the "Fitzgibbons Burlesque Opera Troupe" offered a chance to see a professional musical variety show. Alf Howard, the violinist, gave reason for some to decide that northwest Arkansas was at last becoming civilized. The final events, the panoramas, possibly opened a new world to the audiences of the region as pictures in unheard of dimensions were presented for their viewing. Adding these events to the other entertainments of the time, there was a variety, however meager, of amusement fare for the curious of the area.

CHAPTER VII

PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC COMPANIES BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

The professional actors who were the pioneers of the theatre in the South and West were some of the most adventuresome and enterprising personalities of the nineteenth century. The effort which they expended in travel alone was enough to prompt the modern man's incredulous admiration. The purpose of this chapter is to present information pertaining to the pioneer professional actors who performed in legitimate theatre in northwest Arkansas before the Civil War.

I. THE EARLIEST EFFORTS IN RELATED REGIONS

Northwest Arkansas was a region which a traveler seldom "passed through." Instead, if he arrived there at all, he had most certainly made an effort to do so. The actors who performed there before the war did so because there had been penetration of the state of Arkansas by professional actors somewhat earlier.

The Chapman Family and Their Floating Theatre

Perhaps the earliest theatrical performances within the limits of Arkansas Territory were presented by the Chapman family on their floating theatre. This family is given credit for the invention of the showboat, for in 1831 they constructed a flat barge, complete with a "theatre" and set out from Pittsburgh with New Orleans as their

destination. Their plan was to "drift with the current down the Ohio and the Mississippi, stopping for a one-night performance at each river landing where an audience seemed likely. . . ."1

Noah Ludlow describes their boat as a "large flatboat, with a flag attached, upon which was plainly visible the words 'Theatre.'"2 When Ludlow saw them in Cincinnati, they were on their way to New Orleans stopping "at every town or village on the banks of the river where they supposed they could get together a sufficient audience."3 He also makes the observation that "they navigated their way at pleasure, down and up the rivers of the west, playing at all the towns adjacent."4

It is likely, then, that they played in the early 1830's along the western banks of the Mississippi in Arkansas Territory. They ascended the Arkansas and other rivers of the state on some occasions. Constance Rourke says of the Chapmans on Arkansas rivers:

They even went up the wild Arkansas, and the still wilder White River, pulling themselves upstream by the process known as bushwacking--that is, literally climbing up the river by clutching bushes and then walking to the stern of the boat. Sometimes they were towed by a steamer. . . . With delicacy and spirit at their command, they could also deal out grape and canister to rowdies who attacked their boat far up the Arkansas.⁵

¹Philip Graham, Showboats: The History of an American Institution (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 13.

²Noah Ludlow, Dramatic Life as I Found It (St. Louis: G. I. Jones and Company, 1880), p. 568.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 569.

⁵Constance M. Rourke, The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), pp. 138-39.

The Arkansas Gazette reported in July, 1839, that the Chapmans were playing at Pine Bluff where they were drawing crowded houses.⁶ Whether they were ever able to ascend the river as far as Fort Smith or Van Buren is not known.

The First Professional Theatre in Little Rock, 1838-1840

The first full season of professional theatre in the state began in Little Rock on December 3, 1838.⁷ Sam Waters was the manager of the company which included seven men and three women.⁸ In writing of this season D. Allen Stokes reports that "None of the players, except for Waters himself, can be identified with any certainty."⁹ He further makes the assumption that no actor or actress of recognized talent would have joined "a stock company inaugurating the theater in a town of 1,412 souls, 309 of them slaves."¹⁰

This company performed with some regularity until April of the following year. By April 10 Waters considered closing the theatre

⁶Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, July 24, 1839.

⁷Ibid., December 5, 1838.

⁸Denham Lee Wooten, "Annals of the Stage in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1834-1890" (unpublished Master's thesis, Columbia University, New York City, 1935), p. 5.

⁹D. Allen Stokes, "The First Theatrical Season in Arkansas: Little Rock, 1838-1839," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXIII (Summer, 1964), 169.

¹⁰Ibid.

and taking the company up the Arkansas River.¹¹ However, he continued to perform in Little Rock until May 8, 1839.¹² This date marked the end of the first professional theatre season in the state. If Waters took his company up the Arkansas River to Fort Smith and Van Buren, there is no record of their visit.

Sam Waters returned to Little Rock in October and reopened the theatre on October 30, 1839.¹³ The theatre ran until February 25, 1840, when it closed with a benefit performance for the volunteer fire company.¹⁴ After the closing of the theatre the company was forced to leave without receiving pay for the last month of benefits.¹⁵ Water's theatre in Little Rock did result in a visit from the first professional troupe to perform in the northwest region.

II. THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL THEATRICAL TROUPE IN THE REGION

The first indication of a professional theatrical company in northwest Arkansas occurs in a Little Rock paper during the spring of 1840.

Theatrical.--Several members of the theatrical company which was performing here during the last season, have returned from

¹¹Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, April 10, 1839; Little Rock Times and Advocate, April 8, 1839.

¹²Stokes, op. cit., p. 183.

¹³Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, November 6, 1839.

¹⁴Ibid., February 29, 1840.

¹⁵Ibid.

a trip up the river, and commence performing this evening in the warehouse of Mr. Badgett, which has been fitted up for the purpose. Mrs. Kirk and Mrs. Cabell are of the number. The pieces selected for tonight are the Young Widow and Perfection. For the present the theatre will be open only three nights in the week.¹⁶

This brief mention of "a trip up the river" is supported by an article which appears forty-two years later in Wheeler's Independent, a Fort Smith paper. The article was written when Edwin Archer, a former resident of Indian Territory and a frequent visitor to Fort Smith in days past, returned to visit old friends. The headline to the article reads: "Edwin Archer, the Actor, Bohemian Journalist and Printer."

Mr. Archer came to Fort Smith first in the fall of 1840 accompanying the first theatrical troupe that ever came up the river and played at this place. He made his debut on the stage with the renowned Charlotte Cushman at the Old Albany theatre under the management of William Rufus Blake, in 1836. Mr. A. wandered back to the border shortly after the assassination of the elder Boudinot, and became a resident, by marriage of Cherokee Nation.¹⁷

A Mr. Archer is listed as appearing in Master and Man, or The Neglected Patriot in the Little Rock Theatre in February, 1840.¹⁸ It is probable that this was the same Edwin Archer who, in 1882, remembered his trip with "the first theatrical troupe" to play at Fort Smith. If so, his season was incorrect for the above article from the April 22, 1840, issue of the Arkansas Gazette indicates that the troupe went up in the spring rather than the fall. It can be said with some certainty

¹⁶Ibid., April 22, 1840.

¹⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, November 29, 1882.

¹⁸Little Rock Arkansas Star, February 13, 1840.

that the first professional company to perform in the region appeared in the spring of 1840. Due to the fact that no newspapers had yet started publication in the region, no record of the plays performed, the players, or of the reaction of the audience to this pioneer theatrical venture exists.

This early troupe probably went up the Arkansas River by steamboat. Until the advent of the railroads this was the safest and most convenient way to travel up the river valley from Little Rock. But while it was the most convenient, it was also the most uncertain because of the unpredictable water level of the river. At this time, however, a stage line ran between Fort Smith and Lewisburg (the present town of Morrilton) and in 1841 it was extended to Little Rock.¹⁹ Boats and stages notwithstanding

travel on the Arkansas frontier remained slow, dangerous and uncertain until the advent of the railroads. The traveler was dependent on the stage of the rivers if he went by boat and at the mercy of the weather if he traveled overland. From written accounts of people who traveled in Arkansas, the comforts and accommodations or rather the lack of them were such that traveling was a drudgery rather than a pleasure.²⁰

When the company of actors from the Little Rock Theatre appeared in Fort Smith in 1840 it is likely that they did so only by great effort and persistence. Probably they played in some of the river towns other than Fort Smith. Van Buren was actually larger than Fort Smith and could

¹⁹Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 511.

²⁰Boyd W. Johnson, The Arkansas Frontier (n.d.: c. 1957), p. 118.

more fully support a theatre than could the town up the river at the fort. In 1840 Judge Paschal wrote in an invitation to the dedication of the city's first church building that the reader ignore reports that Van Buren

is the most notoriously wicked city in the region. . . . for these same people have built one of the best houses for public worship in the state, and they have sent for a bell which can be heard above everything else. . . . the sound of racetrack and grogeries.²¹

It is unlikely that a troupe of pioneer actors would pass up a town of this sort.

III. THE SECOND PROFESSIONAL COMPANY IN THE REGION, 1841

The following year the second pioneer theatrical company made its appearance in northwest Arkansas. The Fayetteville Witness records a theatrical troupe in the April 3, 1841, issue of the paper. The article states in full:

THE THEATRE: Last evening our citizens were presented with a theatrical performance. The "Fakers" labored as well as the nature of the case would admit and we hope gave satisfaction to all. Mrs. Newton dances very prettily. Bills are out for another performance this evening. The pieces are "Day after the Wedding," "Road to Bath" and "The Masquerade Ball." Songs and dancing between pieces. Drop in and take a peep, if only for the sake of novelty.²²

Mr. and Mrs. Newton appeared in the Little Rock Theatre in

²¹Sam Hugh Park, "A Capsule History of Van Buren, From 1800 to 1900," Centennial edition Van Buren, Arkansas Press-Argus, September 1, 1961, p. 1.

²²Fayetteville Witness, April 3, 1841.

December, 1840, and January, 1841.²³ The Mrs. Newton mentioned in the above article probably was the Mrs. Newton of the Little Rock Theatre. The Newtons were allowed two benefit performances during January of 1841. The first was presented on Monday, January 4, and the Arkansas Star states that the weather proved "so unfavorable as to prevent our citizens from bestowing upon them the favor we believe they deserve."²⁴ A second benefit was scheduled for them on the evening of January 28, 1841. This was the last mention of the Newtons in the Little Rock papers.²⁵ They likely left Little Rock after this benefit and traveled up the Arkansas River valley, where they might have performed at Van Buren and Fort Smith before crossing the mountains to reach Fayetteville.

The trip through the mountains to Fayetteville could not have been easy. The roads were primitive and were maneuvered either by foot, horseback, or wagon.²⁶ How this theatrical company traveled and how long it was in Fayetteville is not known.

Elbert Bowen in his study, Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War, found that in early June, 1841, an actor named Newton and a "spirited little company of theatricals" were appearing with the local thespians in Boonville, Missouri.²⁷ If this were the

²³Little Rock Arkansas Star, December 17 and 31, 1840; January 7 and 28, 1841.

²⁴Ibid., January 7, 1841.

²⁵Ibid., January 28, 1841.

²⁶William S. Campbell, One Hundred Years of Fayetteville, 1828-1928 (Jefferson City, Missouri; c. 1928), p. 19.

²⁷Elbert R. Bowen, Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War (University of Missouri Studies, Vol. XXXII. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1959), p. 51.

same company, it was not unlikely that it had traveled overland from Fayetteville to Boonville, an amazing feat for those days.

Mr. and Mrs. Newton may well have been the actor and his wife who appeared in the St. Louis theatre, the New Orleans theatres, and the Houston theatre during the late 1830's.²⁸ According to news accounts, the Newtons were not appearing in any of those cities at the time of the appearance of this troupe of "fakers" in Fayetteville.

Both the hardships and uncertainties of travel in the wilderness of northwest Arkansas and the sparseness of population centers made the appearance of professional dramatic troupes a rarity, and only one other such visit is recorded before the latter part of the 1850's.

IV. THE DYKES, 1843

As the towns grew, occasional events broke the monotony of the isolated existence of the citizens of the small towns. At Van Buren an item appears in the Arkansas Intelligencer, July 22, 1843.

THEATRICAL: The Dykes floated past our town with all their stock, men, women, horses, dogs, etc., in a Broad Horn [sic]. They were hailed by one of our sheriffs, invited to land, and requested to hand over some dues to the town for licenses, etc.,

²⁸Mention of both Mr. and Mrs. Newton can be found in the following sources: John S. Kendall, The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), pp. 254-59, passim; William G. B. Carson, The Theatre on the Frontier; The Early Years of the St. Louis Stage (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 185, 181, 192; Carson, Managers in Distress, pp. 83, 84, 95, 186, 203, 205; Ludlow, op. cit., pp. 470, 482, 483, 561, 610; Joseph Gallegly, Footlights on the Border, The Galveston and Houston Stage Before 1900 (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton and Company, 1962), pp. 20, 21, 24, 41, 44, 68, 69, 70.

which they forgot to settle when they left; but the current was too rapid, and they could not make a landing. Let them "float on." We only hope that when they turn their course in this direction, that they will take passage in the same kind of craft they are now aboard of [sic].²⁹

The presence of the animals indicates that it might have included some circus type acts. The troupe probably performed at the other river towns while in northwest Arkansas.

A William Dyke is mentioned by Sol Smith as "somewhat notorious as a strolling manager in Indiana and Illinois. . . ." ³⁰ Smith recounts that Dyke once wrote a letter to his brother Lemuel Smith for an engagement in "the words and figures following, to wit:"

Dear Sir:--I am informed u are in want of a woman. I can furnish you with my wife. She plays Mrs. Haller and dances the slack wire eleguntly--the vursatility of her talents you may perceive by this is astonishing; and I don't give up the mock duke to no actor in the country. if you want my wife you can have us boath on reasonable turms, say ate (8) dollars for her and sick (6) for me. Rite by return of male. Ures, Wm. Dyke.³¹

Another mention of a man named Dyke is made by Francis C. Wemyss. Wemyss calls him "a strolling pioneer; an eccentric manager actor, roaming over prairies, and never fixed long enough in one position to say there he is, but by report there he was, for many years."³²

²⁹Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, July 22, 1843.

³⁰Sol Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868), p. 98.

³¹Ibid.

³²Francis Courtney Wemyss, Chronology of the American Stage from 1752 to 1852 (New York: William Taylor and Company, c. 1852), p. 45.

If this is the same Dyke who traveled on the broadhorn mentioned in the Van Buren paper, it is not surprising that the boat was unable to land to pay the license fee.

The only entertainments by professional performers which were recorded during the next fifteen years were circuses and minstrel troupes. The lone professional activity in the entire state for the legitimate theatre was a brief period in Little Rock during late 1846.³³ Northwest Arkansas benefited little from this brief engagement.

IV. MR. SCOTT'S THEATRE

This apparent theatrical drought was broken by the appearance of a couple named Mr. and Mrs. Scott in Fort Smith in December, 1858. The Herald carries the following information pertaining to "Mr. Scott's Theatre." "Mr. Scott has devoted much time in preparing his scenery (which is entirely new), for the two new pieces which are to be played." The editor of the paper encourages attendance and says: "It is useless for us to say more, for Mr. and Mrs. Scott are too well and favorably known. Vive la Scott."³⁴

The notice indicates that the couple had been there for some while. This may have been the same company which appeared in several Missouri towns in 1858 "giving exhibitions in Jefferson City, Liberty, and Kansas City and probably others." This company was called a

³³Little Rock Arkansas Banner, December 9, 16, 30, 1846.

³⁴Fort Smith Herald, December 25, 1858.

"Variety Concert Troupe" and D. L. Scott was its manager. It mixed farces, songs, dances, pantomimes, stunts, and even magic.³⁵ Another possibility is that A. D. Scott, a performer in a professional minstrel troupe which had performed earlier in the year,³⁶ might have stayed in the region to promote other theatrical activities. A final possibility might be found in a George W. Scott who had helped Miss Butler's Female Academy to stage the Flower Queen in Van Buren earlier in the year.³⁷

Whoever they were, they were the first theatrical performers in fifteen years who were not amateur, circus, or minstrel. The indications are that they took more care in preparing a space for the theatrical entertainments than was usually the case. The spaces for performances in the past had frequently been just temporary or existing space in hotels or public buildings. The introduction of "new scenery" was a novelty to the region as well as an improvement in the quality of production.

This group served as only a prelude to the final theatrical effort in the region before the war. The following year, a more or less permanent theatre began operation and established professional legitimate theatre as a part of the life in Fort Smith and the other towns of the region.

³⁵Bowen, op. cit., p. 59.

³⁶Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, April 16, 1858.

³⁷Ibid., June 5, 1858.

V. NICK MORONEY - 1859-1862

In the summer of 1858, Nick Moroney left Memphis, Tennessee, for Little Rock where he had leased the new theatre which had been erected by John Robinson. Moroney had been proprietor of "Moroney's Varieties" in Memphis. The Memphis Ledger gives Moroney and his wife the following send-off:

Mr. N. Moroney, the proprietor of "Moroney's Varieties" accompanied by his amiable and accomplished lady, leave us this evening by boat for their future permanent home in Little Rock.³⁸

The theatre was opened on October 27, 1858, with a company which included Moroney, his wife, John Conner, Mrs. E. D. Palmer, Messrs. John Huntley and Campbell.³⁹ The company performed in Little Rock with some regularity.

Moroney's company continued to perform until March 9, 1859, when the theatre closed for the season.⁴⁰ Following the closing of the theatre, the company went up the river to Fort Smith. The Little Rock True Democrat reports in April of that year that

Moroney and his company are in Fort Smith, and are winning golden opinions and mint-drops. The Times of that city mentions the acting of Mrs. Palmer in the farce of "The Good for Nothing," as Our Nan. Miss Ada Webb played it here, but not nearly as well as did Mrs. P. We doubt if the latter's representation of that character can be surpassed.⁴¹

The company of actors in Moroney's troupe at Fort Smith included

³⁸Memphis Ledger, August 18, 1858, quoted by Wooten, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁹Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, October 27, 1859.

⁴⁰Ibid., March 9, 1859.

⁴¹Ibid., April 13, 1859.

Mr. and Mrs. Moroney, Mr. and Mrs. E. D. Palmer, John Huntley, C. B. Mullholland,⁴² Hackett, and Miss Tree. Indications are that several other performers were in this initial venture, but their names are not mentioned in the newspapers. The actors who are listed as being in Fort Smith at this time were formerly with Moroney in his Little Rock theatre. The troupe was always in a state of change and it is difficult to be exact in the enumeration of the actors at any one time.

Moroney's company fits well Bernheim's definition of a stock company.⁴³ It was a self contained unit which was free from outside influences. The actors were relatively permanent although there were frequent departures and arrivals among the cast. The scenery, costumes, and properties which were used in the plays belonged to the company, but probably most of the equipment belonged to Mr. Moroney. The scenery was used repeatedly with few changes from play to play. Moroney became associated with the Fort Smith Theatre and remained with it for almost three years.

The first performance which was reviewed was Lucretia Borgia, presented on the evening of May 3, 1859, as a benefit for Mrs. Moroney. Mrs. Moroney had succeeded in winning a following among the theatre-goers. The paper states that on the evening of her benefit her

⁴²Wemyss mentions a Mr. Mulholland and says of him: "This gentleman travels occasionally as a 'star;' is now, May, 1852, at the Theatre in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania." Wemyss, op. cit., p. 166.

⁴³Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., reprint of 1932 edition, 1964), p. 10.

popularity in the town was evidenced when "every seat in the house was occupied, in fact it was by far the BEST HOUSE OF THE SEASON." The cast included Mrs. Moroney as Lucretia Borgia, Nick Moroney as Generro, and C. B. Mulholland "doubled the parts" of the Duke and Gubetta. At the end of the play the Moroneys were covered with bouquets. The paper states: "In fact, Jenny Lind herself, would feel proud of such a demonstration of public approbation."⁴⁴

The theatre had received such popular acclaim that the Van Buren paper suggested that the troupe visit their town. In keeping with a rivalry which had developed over the years between Van Buren and Fort Smith, the Arkansas Intelligencer makes the following statement about Mrs. Moroney's appearance in Fort Smith: "We hope ere long, to hear of her appearance before audiences more capable of appreciating true genius."⁴⁵ The Times answers this jibe in the following manner:

SCRIBE, THIS IS A HARD KNOCK: however, as Mr. Moroney intends visiting, with his theatre, some of the "Country Places" in the vicinity of the city of Fort Smith, he may probably visit Van Buren, where doubtless "audiences more capable of appreciating true genius" will be found to judge the merits of Mrs. Moroney.⁴⁶

The popularity of the theatre continued and the following week the Times observes: "The Theatre is still in full blast--giving great satisfaction in all the plays produced therein, and is evidently in

⁴⁴Fort Smith Times, May 5, 1859.

⁴⁵Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, n.d., quoted in the Fort Smith Times, May 5, 1859.

⁴⁶Fort Smith Times, May 5, 1859.

favor in the country, from the large and respectable audiences that attend almost every night."⁴⁷

On the evening of May 13, 1859, a benefit for Mr. Huntley was advertised. The plays were to be The Soldier's Daughter, and A Day After the Fair, an afterpiece. In the latter Huntley was to impersonate six different characters. Huntley is commended by the paper because he manifested "singularly good taste" and he preserved the stage from "every exhibition of coarse vulgarity, that might offend the taste in any degree." His performances are said to be well prepared for "in his playing, he has never needed the 'cue' from either prompter or player." He is also characterized as a man of "unexceptionable character and habits."⁴⁸

The fame of the Fort Smith Theatre spread throughout the region. The Fayetteville Arkansian prints the following letter, dated May 15, from one of its correspondents:

The theatre at Fort Smith will (as the New Yorker said of the Mississippi River on seeing it for the first time), "do very well for a new country." Mr. Mulholland in The Old Guard of Napoleon is certainly a star performer. The manager, Mr. Moroney, has gone East to prepare for the fall season. He is a gentleman with whom I was much pleased, and an actor of great promise, judging from the sentiments of the connoisseurs of stage acting. His lady, Mrs. N. Moroney in the play of the Italian wife's revenge acquitted herself with great credit, her acting is natural and effective.⁴⁹

The trip East which the letter mentions was likely a trip down

⁴⁷Ibid., May 12, 1859.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Fayetteville Arkansian, May 21, 1859.

the river to Memphis, and in June the Arkansas True Democrat reported that Moroney and his troupe passed through on their return to Fort Smith. This made Moroney the manager of two theatres, the one in Little Rock which he still leased although no troupe was performing there and the Fort Smith Theatre.⁵⁰

E. D. Palmer's Independent Venture

During Moroney's absence from Fort Smith, E. D. Palmer had fitted up a hall over Compagnion's confectionary store on Ozark Street and offered variety entertainment. The hall is described as "neatly and beautifully finished, and being well ventilated, will add much to the comfort of the audience."⁵¹

Palmer's wife had performed with Moroney's theatre and Palmer may have acted with the Moroney troupe also. The article states: "The character that Mr. Palmer has established himself here, as a musician and an actor, as well as that of Mrs. Palmer as a favorite actress and danseuse, will ensure to them success in their new undertaking."⁵²

Palmer evidently set himself up as a separate manager, for in June of that year he appeared in Van Buren in a "Pavillion Theatre" which was promised to have "a good company of actors." The "pavillion" was pitched on the bank of the river in Van Buren. The opening play was to have been The Yankee Duelist, and the program was to conclude

⁵⁰Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, June 8, 1859.

⁵¹Fort Smith Times, May 26, 1859.

⁵²Ibid.

with Our Nan, a play in which Mrs. Palmer excelled as "Nan."⁵³

The venture met with encouraging success at Van Buren, although the weather operated greatly against a tent show of this kind. Following his stay in Van Buren, Palmer planned to return to Fort Smith.⁵⁴ The troupe, however, was still performing in Van Buren on the thirtieth of June.⁵⁵

Moroney Returns

When Moroney returned to Fort Smith, he brought scenery painted by Mr. Riley, a new member of his company. The "Temple of Thespis" opened in early June for the second season with a large and efficient cast. The scale of prices was: Parquette or raised seats, 75 cents; Children, 35 cents; Colored Gallery, 40 cents. Riley, the scene painter, was also available to paint signs for "those who want them, and every business house in town should have a sign."⁵⁶ This is an indication of the versatility which the pioneer actors exhibited.

In June, 1859, the staff of the Fort Smith Theatre included Nick Moroney as lesse and manager, and J. Huntley as the acting and stage manager. The theatre was located on Ozark Street, opposite the

⁵³Van Buren Arkansas Intelligencer, n.d., quoted in Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, June 22, 1859.

⁵⁴Fort Smith Times, June 16, 1859.

⁵⁵Ibid., June 30, 1859.

⁵⁶Ibid., June 9, 1859.

old St. Charles Hotel.⁵⁷ The performers for the company at this time included C. B. Mulholland, Mrs. Nick Moroney, S. M. Irwin, and Mrs. J. Bowlden.

During this period the theatre ran almost every night. The newspaper advertisements always refer the reader to "bills of the day" or "circulars" if there should be any change in the program. Most of the records for casts and plays are not extant because of this day to day advertising. A partial schedule can be pieced together from the weekly advertisements and remarks in the paper.

The Fort Smith Theatre flourished. During the week of June 13 an original play, Fort Smith 100 Years Hence, was produced on two separate nights.⁵⁸ Bombastes Furioso was presented on the evening of June 16, 1859, by a group of amateurs who offered their services to the theatre for a benefit for Mrs. Moroney.⁵⁹

A letter requesting a benefit performance for J. Huntley appeared in the paper on June 23. This letter was signed by thirty-two of the men in the town. The first play offered was Serious Family with a cast of S. M. Irwin, C. B. Mulholland, and Mrs. Moroney. Between the play and farce, Tom Jones, the "excelsior Jig Dancer who won the Silver Prize Cup in a contest with Mr. Charles Payne at Little Rock" was to perform. The evening was to conclude with "the beautiful comedy

⁵⁷Ibid., June 16, 1859.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

in one act entitled The Morning Call," starring S. M. Irwin as Sir Edward Ardent and Mrs. Moroney as Mrs. Chillington.⁶⁰

On Monday night, June 27, 1859, the first recorded performance of Hamlet in the region was given as a benefit for Mulholland. The supporting cast included Irwin and Huntley, and Mulholland probably played Hamlet.⁶¹

On Thursday, June 30, "Sir Edward Lyttleton Bulwer's [sic] beautiful play of The Lady of Lyons" was to be presented. The cast included Moroney as Claude Melnotte, Huntley as Col. Damas, S. M. Irwin as Glavis, Mrs. Moroney as Pauline, and Mrs. J. Bowlden as Madam Deschappelles. The evening was to conclude with a farce entitled Dead Shot with Hector Timid played by Moroney and Louisa Lovetuck by Mrs. Moroney.⁶²

The following Saturday, July 2, a benefit was scheduled for J. A. Signaigo, an actor who is only mentioned this one time in regard to the Fort Smith Theatre. He was known in the Memphis theatre as well as in the Little Rock Theatre. No play is mentioned for this benefit.

The Fort Smith season drew to a close in July. A benefit for Miss Frank Pierson was to be presented on the evening of July 14. Miss Pierson was evidently a new addition to the company at this time. She was to perform in three pieces: Love in Humble Life, "a petite burletta," with a cast of C. B. Mulholland as Benslace, Nick Moroney as

⁶⁰Ibid., June 23, 1859.

⁶¹Ibid., June 30, 1859.

⁶²Ibid.

Carlitz, and Miss Pierson as Christine; the second was to be Blackeyed Susan, "a nautical spectacle," with Mulholland, Moroney and Miss Pierson in the cast; and finally, Miss Pierson was to play Nan in Our Nan or The Good For Nothing with J. Huntley playing Dibbles.⁶³

The final performance of the season was on the evening of July 21, 1859. The two plays presented that evening were Ingomar, the Barbarian and an afterpiece entitled Pleasant Neighbor. Ingomar was played by Mulholland and Parthenia by Mrs. Moroney in the first play. J. Huntley played Cristopher Strap and Miss Frank Pierson, Nancy Strap, in Pleasant Neighbor. For this production the box office was open on Thursday, July 21, from nine to twelve a.m. and from two to five p.m. The advertisement promised "attentive ushers will attend visitors to their places, order and decorum will be strictly preserved."⁶⁴

Moroney includes in the advertisement for the theatre a note of thanks to the citizens and patrons "for the immense liberality bestowed on him during his sojourn here. . . ." He states that he has been there for fifteen weeks and is planning to reopen his theatre in early October with many new additions to his stock company who "will enable him to carry on the campaign with the aid of the Garrison, the city bulwarks, and surrounding allies with certain success."⁶⁵

The Fort Smith Times warmly praises the theatre in the following article:

⁶³Ibid., July 14, 1859.

⁶⁴Ibid., July 21, 1859.

⁶⁵Ibid.

THE THEATRE: This establishment after tonight closes until October. Mr. Moroney has been among us some four months, during which time, he has proven himself a gentleman and an actor. He has gained for himself many warm friends. As to his estimable lady, too much cannot be said in her praises. The compliment, principally gotten up by the ladies, in the way of a benefit and the list of names subscribed, ought to be sufficient proof to convince that lady of the esteem in which she is held by our citizens."⁶⁶

The article adds that neither Mulholland nor Huntley ever failed in any character in which they appeared, and Miss Bowlden has considerable talent but needs "proper tuition, which would make her an excellent actress." Miss Pierson is characterized as a newcomer to the company and a "superior vocalist." Miss Wallace is said to be "evidently improving."⁶⁷ The article concludes with the following statement:

Mr. M. starts Friday morning for Van Buren. We commend him heartily to our friends there, and sincerely hope he may reap a good harvest. --Friend Moroney, our citizens you may depend, will hail your return with joy. Farewell, for the present.⁶⁸

Moroney in Van Buren, July-August, 1859

With this rousing send-off, Moroney took a company composed of "thirteen ladies and gentlemen" to Van Buren.⁶⁹ Some weeks before the troupe made the five-mile journey from Fort Smith, Nick Moroney had rented a hall and set about preparing it for his acting company.⁷⁰ The group performed for three weeks.

The theatre in Van Buren opened on Saturday evening, July 23,

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Van Buren Press, July 27, 1859.

⁷⁰Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, July 13, 1859.

1859. The location of the building is now known; however, the stage was "well fitted up with excellent scenery, and everything was in excellent trim for theatrical representations."⁷¹ The first play performed in this theatre was Ingomar, the Barbarian. Mulholland and Mrs. Moroney had the lead roles of Ingomar and Parthenia. The Van Buren Press was the first paper in the region to attempt anything approaching a critical review of a production. Of Ingomar the paper states:

The play on Saturday evening was "Ingomar, the Barbarian," the character of Ingomar being sustained by Mr. Mulholland, and as the barbarian, subdued into childlike submissiveness by the beauty and loveliness of Parthenia, (Mrs. Moroney) was well conceived and admirably personated. Mrs. Moroney as Parthenia, was true in her conception of the character, and by her consummate ability and excellent acting, carried her audience with storms of applause. All the other characters were well sustained.⁷²

On the following Monday evening Fazio was the leading attraction. Mulholland sustained the character of Fazio and Mrs. Moroney played his wife, Bianca. The acting was commended, and Mrs. Moroney's Bianca "was a performance of which she may be justly proud as it undoubtedly ranks her as the 'star' of the troupe."⁷³

On Tuesday night the name of the play was not reported but the paper does note that the audience had not been large. The oppressive heat was offered as a reason for the slim attendance for it "prevents many from attending who would otherwise do so."⁷⁴

Moroney announced that he was concluding the season in Van

⁷¹Van Buren Press, July 27, 1859.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Buren because he was not making expenses. The editor of the paper encouraged him not to close so soon. "We think Mr. Moroney is rather hasty in his determination, having hardly given our city a fair trial, and we trust he will be induced to remain with us another week, and we feel assured he will receive a liberal patronage."⁷⁵

The Van Buren Press of August third reports that on Friday night, July 29, "an entertainment was given by the ladies and gentlemen connected with the theatrical troupe of Mr. Moroney, as a complimentary benefit to Mrs. Moroney, the leading actress of the troupe," The theatre was full to capacity, "every spare spot being occupied by some eager listener." The first play was His Last Legs starring Mulholland as O'Callaghan, Mrs. Bowldin as Mrs. Montague, Julia was performed by Miss Rosa Bowldin, Frank Rivers by Miss Frank Pierson, and Mr. Rivers by Huntley. Miss Pierson was "equally at home in the personification of the 'sterner sex,' as in the portrayal of the beauty and loveliness of her own." The whole play was "excellently cast and admirably performed." The closing play was Temptation, or The Irish Emigrant. Mrs. Moroney played Mrs. Bobalinks but the paper sadly notes: "This play was hardly the one for the benefit of so worthy an actress as Mrs. Moroney."⁷⁶

On the evening of Monday, August 1, 1859, the company presented Douglas Jerrold's "sublime play" Black Eyed Susan, with Mulholland and Mrs. Moroney as the "stars" of the play. Miss Pierson played "Gnatbrain" and gave an "admirable presentation." The paper notes that she should

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

be cast in more female roles "where her inimitable talent and ability might more readily show itself."⁷⁷

New Managers

During the week of August 3, 1859, Mulholland and Huntley took over the management of the troupe at the Van Buren theatre, and the Moroneys left the troupe until fall. The new managers planned to be open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Mulholland was advertised to appear on the night of Wednesday as "Haversac" in The Old Guard.⁷⁸

The paper states:

We hope our citizens will turn out and give the new management a cordial greeting. They are both gentlemen of more than common abilities, and under their auspices we trust our citizens will have a series of performances offered them which shall challenge their admiration. We will help you all we can, gentlemen, and wish you much success.⁷⁹

The next week the attendance increased and was better than any previous week. This was said to be the result of a reduction in the price of admission and the fact that only three performances took place during the week.

The plays for the week included Toodles and Loan of A Lover on Saturday, August 6, 1859. On Wednesday, August 10, The Serious Family was to be performed. The cast was to include Huntley, Mulholland, Hadley, Kayser, and Smith, all mentioned for the first time in the paper. The women were Mrs. Bowlden, Misses Pierson, Bowlden and

⁷⁷Ibid., August 3, 1859.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Wallace. Paddy Miles was to conclude the evening.⁸⁰

On the following Friday night Mulholland had a benefit, and on Saturday night, August 13, 1859, there was a benefit for Mrs. and Miss Bowlden.⁸¹ The Press regretted that the Saturday night performance did not attract the large attendance which came to the theatre on Friday night. A severe rain storm was cited as the cause.⁸²

In the twenty-two days it was at Van Buren, the troupe performed at least ten nights and perhaps more. While the attendance was light at first, it picked up after Moroney turned the management over to Mulholland and Huntley. At the close of the brief season a listing of most of the company is possible. The men included Moroney (in the first week only), C. B. Mulholland, John Huntley, Hadley, Kayser, and Smith. The women included Mrs. Moroney (in the first week only), Mrs. Bowlden, Misses Frank Pierson, Rosa Bowlden, and Wallace.

A Week at Greenwood

Whether the company had any great financial success is not known but it was able to stay together for a barn-storming week at Greenwood, the county seat of Sebastian County, during the week of August 15, where it performed for the entertainment of those who were in attendance at circuit court. No newspaper was published in Greenwood at this time, but two letters written to hometown papers record some of

⁸⁰Ibid., August 10, 1859.

⁸¹Ibid., August 17, 1859.

⁸²Ibid.

the events of this brief theatrical venture. The first letter was published in the Van Buren Press on August 24, 1859. The letter begins:

The circuit court began its session on Monday last, with a full docket of misdemeanors, petty felonies, and unnumbered civil cases, and a fair share of murder cases. The able judge Wilson made the little cases "hump themseleve" and get off the "boards" in double quick time.

The letter continues with the news of court and ends with a discussion of the theatre.

The theatre, under the management of Messrs. Huntley and Mulholland, are making plenty of fun and having full houses every night. Mulholland is making many sides sore with his Irish characters; Huntley does his parts well. Miss Pierson and Miss Rosa Bowlden are making sad havoc with the hearts of the young gents of this city. Miss P. does her parts finely, and Miss B. is improving all the time and promises to make a fine actress.⁸³

The second letter, dated August 19, 1859, was published in the Fayetteville Arkansian in early September. The letter to Fayetteville indicates that the troupe occupied a "comfortable pavillion, there being no suitable room for their purposes in the city." This letter echoes the complaint that the charming actress, Miss Pierson, impersonated young gentlemen too much. It also supports the writer of the first letter in its evaluation of Miss Bowlden and calls her "a young actress of much promise."⁸⁴

An event occurred while the troupe was in Greenwood which both of the letters mention. One evening, while Miss Rosa Bowlden was acting in The Omnibus, her dress came in touch with one of the footlights and

⁸³Ibid., August 24, 1859.

⁸⁴Fayetteville Arkansian, September 2, 1859.

ignited. Instantly she was all ablaze, and but for the quick action of some members of the audience and Huntley, who smothered the blaze, she might have been burned seriously. The play proceeded as if nothing had happened, demonstrating that the pioneer actors of this region knew that "the show must go on."⁸⁵

During the circuit court, the audience could not have been too well behaved for aside from attending the court during the day, only two amusements were provided for the visitors to the small town: the theatre, and "several taverns and drinking houses plenty." One saloon from Fort Smith, The St. Charles, opened a branch at Greenwood during circuit court and did a smashing business.⁸⁶

Return to Van Buren

After the successful week at Greenwood the troupe returned to Van Buren where it gave the first performance on Saturday, September 3, 1859. In addition to the "old favorites," three Negro minstrels had been added. The Fitzgibbon's Burlesque Opera Troupe, composed of several ex-minstrel performers had been scheduled in Fort Smith in late August and these minstrels probably were from this troupe.⁸⁷ No further notices appear until September 14, when the Press carried an announcement that the final performance was scheduled for that night. It was a benefit for Miss Pierson and the editor calls for a good attendance.

⁸⁵Ibid.; Van Buren Press, loc. cit.

⁸⁶Fort Smith Times, August 25, 1859.

⁸⁷Ibid., August 18, 1859.

The article further states: "Let the disgust for the Empire Minstrels give way for tonight and give her a good house."⁸⁸ Who these minstrels were is not known, but they seem to have insulted the audience and jeopardized the popularity of the theatrical troupe through some impropriety.

Mulholland and Huntley in Fayetteville

As early as August 12, 1859, the Fayetteville Arkansian announced that the Van Buren Theatre intended to visit Fayetteville. The troupe arrived and scheduled the first performance on the night of September 17th. The plays were "the interesting and popular, Black Eyed Susan, and Our Nan."⁸⁹ The following issue of the paper has a lengthy review of the first week of the "Dramatic exhibitions" which began "under un auspicious circumstances" the Saturday before.

At the commencement of their enterprise, all the green ones took their share of the show. They soon got tired of grinning at tragedies and paying their halves for the announcement of sober truths and reprimands for inappropriate conduct. At the last few entertainments, many of our leading citizens came in for a sight. On the representations of "Toodles," on Tuesday evening all the beauty and chivalry, and a respectable proportion of churches were in admiration. Presbyterians, Methodists, Cambellites, Cumberlands, Baptists, and Hardshells, enjoyed themselves exceedingly. It would have been unnatural if they had not; for Mr. Mulholland as Toodles, Mr. Huntley as Farmer Acron, were certainly bright stars; and other gentlemen were particularly felicitous in their parts; and as for the ladies, they actually captivated every uncared-for young gentleman in the room--the canvas surrounding.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Van Buren Press, September 14, 1859.

⁸⁹Fayetteville Arkansian, September 16, 1859.

⁹⁰Ibid., September 23, 1859.

The article points out further that if any of the citizens of the city had seen any better performances anywhere "they must have seen Mrs. Siddons, McCready, Grimaldi and Charles Matthews."

The article implies that some objection to the performances of the troupe might have arisen, but "with each exhibition the obstacles giving way continually that have surrounded them, they will increase the interest and improve the representations."⁹¹ This might also have reference to the fact that the ropes on the Pavillion were cut by some mischief maker.

The paper ardently opposes such action and strongly denounces the deed.

Some miserably mischievous person or persons have been practising their deviltry in cutting the ropes and canvass of the pavillion belonging to Messrs. Huntley and Mulholland. It is a shame to the city of Fayetteville, the "Athens of Arkansas," that such disorderly and indecent conduct should occur in our midst. If the honor of the persons so transgressing is not enough to restrain them the law should.

A reward will be given to the Common Council for discovery of these sinners.⁹²

The troupe sustained a successful run for the next week. On the evening of September 30, a benefit was presented for the Washington County Agricultural Fair. In spite of an electrical storm accompanied by high winds, the benefit netted \$33.55 for the fair.⁹³

On the evening of October 1, a benefit for C. B. Mulholland was presented. The plays were Spectre Bridegroom and The Irish Lion. A

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., October 7, 1859.

concert was offered between the two plays.⁹⁴ Saturday night the troupe advertised that it was to present some songs and the play, Omnibus, to close out the season.

The company was absent from the papers of the region for almost a week. It had left Fayetteville, but there is no indication of where it was during this time. It returned to Fayetteville on Saturday, October 15, 1859, and performed that evening. The following Tuesday, October 18, a crowded house saw The Old Guard of Napoleon. The review says that "'Haversack' and 'Melain' brought tears from the eye, and implanted in the memories of the audience a lasting impression of the 'Old Guard' with all his virtues, of 'Melain' with her great affection." The afterpiece was The Lottery Ticket. The reviewer for the Fayetteville Arkansian makes this final statement about the company:

As we have heretofore taken occasion to remark, the acting of Messrs. Huntley and Mulholland, and their corps, is extraordinary; and laboring under the disadvantages they do, defies competition. We speak of what we do know when we say this; and we exhort the unbeliever in their excellencies--if any such there be--to test their qualities; for then, with open ivories and glistening eyes, they will surely endorse our criticism.⁹⁵

Some changes were made in the troupe during the second appearance. Miss Bowlden left the company toward the last of October and mention is made of a Mr. Wilcox who is described as a "decided favorite, more especially with the tender portion of the audiences."⁹⁶ The last performances were given for the Mount Vernon Association, and occurred

⁹⁴Ibid., October 1, 1859.

⁹⁵Ibid., October 28, 1859.

⁹⁶Ibid.

on the nights of October 27 and 28, 1859.

The troupe had played at Fayetteville on two separate instances: first, from September 17 through October 2, 1859; second, from October 15 through October 28, 1859. The performers were a great success with the press, and if the full houses were any indication, they succeeded in pleasing a town which had rarely heard the voices of actors in its thirty year history.

Mulholland and Huntley Return to Van Buren

Mulholland and Huntley took their troupe back down the mountains to Van Buren. The only mention of the performances occurs in a letter of farewell to Miss Frank Pierson signed by twenty-four men of Van Buren. The contents indicate that there was great unhappiness that Miss Pierson had not been "secured, by the manager of the Van Buren Theatre, for the ensuing season." The letter states further:

We cannot in justice to you, refrain from expressing the regret we feel, in losing from the little troupe its greatest attraction. We regard with disfavor, and censure the action of the manager, in omitting to procure your longer engagement--believing that by his neglect, in this respect, he had disregarded the wishes of the public and committed a grave error.⁹⁷

The letter through which Miss Pierson answered the above note, reflects much about this actress.

Gentlemen:

Your flattering note of yesterday's date is just received. Words fail to give utterance to the grateful emotions of my heart, for this kind and unsolicited testimonial which you have been pleased to tender me. Although a stranger in Arkansas, and

⁹⁷Van Buren Press, November 11, 1859.

remote from the friends of my childhood, it is gratifying to know that when I leave the State, I shall leave many valued friends behind me, who, whatever may be my "professional future," can never be forgotten--and in bidding those friends adieu, be assured gentlemen, that wherever I may wander, and whatever may be the vicissitudes of future life, I shall ever carry with me the most pleasing recollections of my visits to Van Buren, Fort Smith and Fayetteville.

Most truly, Frank Pierson.⁹⁸

This letter closes the chapter of the dramatic troupe managed by C. B. Mulholland and John Huntley.

Under the management of Mulholland and Huntley the "little troupe" had performed in Van Buren, Greenwood, Fayetteville, and back at Van Buren. With the exception of the few words of criticism about the "minstrels" and the hint of dissension at Fayetteville, no indication was given of any significant adverse reaction to the troupe's performances. The actors could be categorized as "barnstormers" in that they played in part "in the new and undeveloped territories where there were not yet established theatres."⁹⁹ These troupers gave the citizens of northwest Arkansas many hours of enjoyment through their persistent efforts. The fact that they did this and retained the respect of the press and the theatre goers speaks doubly well for them.

Moroney Returns to Fort Smith

In September, 1859, Nick Moroney advertised in the Little Rock papers for actors for the Fort Smith and Van Buren Theatres.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Bernheim, loc. cit.

THEATRICAL NOTICE. A few persons of acknowledged talent can obtain a good situation (for my Fort Smith and Van Buren Theatres) by making immediate application. I open October 1st. Salaries paid punctually. Security given if necessary.

N. Moroney, Lessee and Manager,
Fort Smith and Van Buren Theatres.¹⁰⁰

Moroney returned to Fort Smith in early October, and proceeded to make some necessary alterations to the theatre. He reported that he had hired a good company of actors, both male and female, and was looking forward to his best season.¹⁰¹ Because of alterations the theatre did not open until early November. The editor of the Fort Smith Times had a suggestion for Moroney to assure his success. "While Mr. M. is making improvements in the house and scenery, we would suggest the propriety of his lowering the price A LITTLE. We think it would be to his advantage."¹⁰²

The opening of the theatre was announced for November fourth and fifth. The Times states:

THEATRE: Mr. Moroney will re-open his theatre on Friday and Saturday nights. He has an entirely new company, and entertains sanguine anticipations of securing the approbation and liberal patronage of the people of Fort Smith, and the surrounding country. Success attend his efforts to please and entertain the public.¹⁰³

The popularity of the theatre was established again by November 17, 1859. The Fort Smith Times states:

The Theatre appears to be a great deal more popular than it was last season, and we think justly so, as it is evident that there is a great deal more talent on the boards than has ever been here before. The dramatic corps is almost complete, and the stage

¹⁰⁰Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, September 14, 1859.

¹⁰¹Fort Smith Times, October 13, 1859.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., November 3, 1859.

in Fort Smith will compare with older and much more eligible places in the country.¹⁰⁴

The "talent on the boards" included some of the performers of the last season, including C. B. Mulholland, John Huntley, Nick Moroney, Hadley, and Mrs. Moroney. The actors who were new to the Fort Smith stage were: John Davis, stage manager; Schilling, orchestra leader; Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Powell; Mrs. Davis; and Messrs. French, Dunn, Taylor, and T. E. Wolfe.

Mulholland made his first appearance of the season on the evening of November 17, 1859, as Pizzaro in the tragedy, Pizzaro, or The Death of Rollo. The evening concluded with the farce, Rendezvous.¹⁰⁵

The alterations to the theatre continued during the first few days of the season, and private family subscription boxes were built. The announcement was made that they would "add materially to the comfort of the auditory." Applications for the reservations of the new box seats were called for.¹⁰⁶

On the weekend a performance of The Hunchback was presented, with Mulholland as the Hunchback, Moroney as Fathom, John Davis as Sir Thomas Clifford, C. W. Powell as Modus, Huntley as Master Heartwell, and Mrs. Moroney as Julia.¹⁰⁷

The theatre continued operation during the following week.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., November 17, 1859.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Fayetteville Arkansian, November 25, 1859, quoting a letter from Van Buren dated Sunday, November 20, 1859.

Moroney had made the theatre the center of the life of the city. The theatre is described as "favored and thriving," the "favorite resort to while away an evening," and the building as "beautiful and attractive."¹⁰⁸

On the evening of November 24, 1859, Mulholland played Haversack in The Old Guard. Melanie was played by Mrs. Moroney, and Mrs. C. W. Powell presented a song. The afterpiece was Naval Engagement, "a new comedietta." Lieutenant Kingston was played by John Davis and Admiral Kingston by John Huntley.¹⁰⁹

On the evening of December 1, 1859, a performance of Romeo and Juliet was scheduled as a benefit for Mulholland. The cast included Mulholland as Romeo, Mrs. Moroney as Juliet, Davis as Mercutio, and Moroney as Peter. The afterpiece was Toodles with Mulholland in the title role and Mrs. Davis playing Mrs. Toodles.¹¹⁰

A benefit was tendered Mrs. Moroney the following Saturday night. The play presented was Macbeth. The newspaper printed a review of the production which exemplifies the infrequent reviews given the theatre in the Fort Smith Times at this time.

Among the several choice bills presented during last week, was that beautiful tragedy--Macbeth, on Saturday night--Mrs. Moroney's benefit. Mrs. M. as Lady Macbeth was perfect. Mr. Mulholland as Macbeth, was easy, graceful and natural, and was presented with evident mastery of the character. Mr. Davis, as MacDuff was perfectly at home, and showed himself as a tragedian to be one of no small merit. Mrs. Davis, and Mrs. Powell, in the witch scenes,

¹⁰⁸Fort Smith Times, November 24, 1859.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid., December 1, 1859.

showed perfection in their parts; and with the company, composed of Messrs. Moroney, Powell, French, Dunn, Hadley and Taylor, added much to the merits of the play.

The performance was concluded with the "Widow's Victim," in which Mrs. Powell led the way, and kept it--proving herself as a versatile actress, to be one of rank and spirit.¹¹¹

In December the weather took a turn for the worse and the theatre attendance suffered as it required a serious effort to traverse the rain soaked, heavily traveled street. In the early part of the week of December 18, 1859, Romeo and Juliet was presented again. The editor again reviews a production of Shakespeare.

We witnessed the representation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, the other night, with an immensity of pleasure. The whole piece was well represented. Mrs. Moroney as Juliet, carried the author's conceptions through the whole play, in a manner that gained for her the well merited approbation of her audience. The Mercutio of Davis, was one of those inimitably successful efforts that cannot fail to place this gentleman in a high position in the art. His Queen Mab speech, was a masterpiece. Mr. Mulholland as Romeo, was as usual welcome to his old patrons.--Mr. Moroney, as Peter was droll in the extreme, and his appearance on the stage was the signal for outbursts of laughter. Mrs. Davis as the Nurse, Mrs. Powell as Lady Capulet, and John Huntley as Capulet, were all that could be desired, rendering their different portions of the play worthy the approbation, nightly bestowed.¹¹²

According to the newspaper reports in northwest Arkansas, the Moroney troupe produced only three of Shakespeare's plays, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet. Hamlet was performed once in Fort Smith on Monday, June 27, 1859. Romeo and Juliet was performed on December 1, 1859, and during the week of December 18, 1859, and Macbeth on December 3, 1859.

¹¹¹Ibid., December 8, 1859.

¹¹²Ibid., December 22, 1859.

Moroney and "His New Stock"

In early February, the paper reports that Mr. Moroney's "new stock gave entire satisfaction, whilst the old hands were, as ever, perfectly at home and good."¹¹³ Mulholland left the Fort Smith company at the beginning of the year and began appearances in the Little Rock Theatre in January, 1860.¹¹⁴ The editor urged citizens of the city to encourage Mr. Moroney's enterprise for he had expended a considerable sum of money but had got little in return for his efforts. Moroney was praised for he had been "liberal in the production of pieces. . . ."¹¹⁵

In late February this troupe left the comfort of the Fort Smith Theatre building and barnstormed to Greenwood in order to appear for the multitude who descended on the town for the circuit court.¹¹⁶ Nothing further is mentioned about Moroney and his actors for more than a month, but the indication is that Moroney was out of town for part of the time.¹¹⁷

Moroney Returns

The next mention of the theatre in Fort Smith concerns the return of the Moroneys in April, 1860. They arrived with a much reduced company and advertised that they would give an exhibition at the theatre

¹¹³Fort Smith Times, February 9, 1860.

¹¹⁴Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, January 11, 1860.

¹¹⁵Fort Smith Times, loc. cit.

¹¹⁶Ibid., February 23, 1860.

¹¹⁷Ibid., April 19, 1860.

on the evening of April 21. The exhibition was to consist of "scenes from popular plays, singing and some new and beautiful tableaux."¹¹⁸

The theatre remained open on some evenings for the next few weeks. On the evening of April 28, Mr. and Mrs. Moroney gave an exhibition of living statuary and performed "several difficult scenes. . . ." They were aided by Mr. T. E. Wolfe, a member of the last company. The paper states:

On Saturday evening, April 28, it was announced that a performance would take place at the theatre, under the management of Mr. Moroney. In consequence of the few actors announced in the bill, we expected to see a failure, (from the fact that several difficult scenes requiring much aid were advertised) we were agreeably disappointed from the first to last; Mr. Wolfe and Mrs. Moroney sustained themselves in the very difficult characters they sustained to the admiration of all in the last part of the performance. Mr. Moroney gave several artistic positions in living statuary, imitating popular Grecian and Roman marble statuary. Mr. Moroney was warmly applauded throughout, and very deservedly so. For the benefit of those who have not seen Living Statuary, we sincerely hope Mr. Moroney will repeat early, and we are certain his house will be filled.¹¹⁹

Mr. and Mrs. Moroney continued to perform at the theatre. They frequently appeared with local amateurs and gave benefits to aid the Fort Smith Rifles, a "home guard" military unit. In June, during a performance of Guy Mannering, they were assisted by fourteen members of the Rifle Corps and the Fort Smith Brass Band.¹²⁰

On the evening of the Fourth of July a play was presented at the theatre by local amateurs and "gave great satisfaction to every

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., May 3, 1860.

¹²⁰Ibid., June 7, 1860.

one present. . . . Mrs. Moroney as the Goddess of Liberty was beautiful and not easy to surpass."¹²¹

Due to the scattered issues of existing newspapers for this period, it is difficult to reconstruct the full activity of the theatre in Fort Smith. In the early part of 1861 the theatre ran with some regularity with the assistance of Mr. and Mrs. Moroney. There was even a plan announced by a newly organized group called The Fort Smith Thespian Club which was composed of members of the Rifle Company, to erect a two-story building, "to be occupied as a theatre, and a Drill Room and Armory for the Rifles."¹²² This group promised a performance upon the second and fourth Thursday evening of every month, and was to have the assistance of the Moroneys at all times. An orchestra was furnished under the control of Mr. Everhart.

Moroney's Theatre on the Eve of Civil Strife

During the period of great turmoil and uncertainty caused by the impending conflict between the North and the South, the theatre in Fort Smith attracted both Union and Southern sympathizers. The fort was in Union hands until April 19, 1861, when Col. Borland ascended the Arkansas River from Little Rock with three hundred state troops to take possession of the fort.¹²³ Captain Sturgis, the commandant of the fort,

¹²¹Ibid., July 12, 1860.

¹²²Fort Smith Daily Times and Herald, March 27, 1861.

¹²³Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: the S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 281.

anticipated the movement and mustered his two companies of cavalry and left the city by the Texas Road.¹²⁴

Captain Sturgis, while commandant of the post, stood strongly by his belief in the Union. Before the state troops forced the evacuation of the fort, Captain Sturgis was reported to have caused some stir at the theatre. In an article which was published in 1922, Frank Weaver, a long time resident of Fort Smith, tells the following tale.

One night during this strenuous period Capt. S. D. Sturgis, Commander of the troops then stationed in the garrison, and a couple of his brother officers were auditors at a play presented at Meroney's [sic] theatre which was located in a building on Ozark Street between Walnut Street and Garrison Avenue. During the interlude between the first and second acts one of the young ladies attached to the theatre appeared before the curtain and rendered a song that was replete with southern sentiment. Enthusiastic applause followed, punctuated by cheers of "Hurrah for the South!" Just as the tumult was dying away Capt. Sturgis waved his hat and shouted, "Hurrah for the Union!" Then came more cheers for the South with a response from Sturgis of "Hurrah for the Union!" This scene continued for several minutes and finally became so exciting that several citizens who were personal friends of Sturgis, though of opposite faith, took seats near the gallant officer fearing that some of the hotheads might attempt to do him violence. The tumult finally subsided and the play proceeded. At the close of the performance Captain Sturgis' volunteer body guard accompanied him and his brother officers to the "Hole in the Wall" [a local saloon] where they indulged a libation or two.¹²⁵

In August of that year Capt. Sturgis was reported to have been killed in a skirmish with Rebel troops in southwest Missouri. The Rebel force included many men from Fort Smith who had known Sturgis.¹²⁶

¹²⁴J. Fred Patton, "History of Fort Smith, Arkansas" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1936), p. 26.

¹²⁵Fort Smith Times-Record, October 1, 1922.

¹²⁶Fort Smith Daily Times and Herald, August 8, 1861.

A state convention was called at Little Rock in May, 1861, and on the evening of May 6 an ordinance of secession was adopted for Arkansas.¹²⁷ In June Arkansas became a member of the Confederate States of America.¹²⁸

The excitement which followed this action led to the presentation of an interesting "propaganda" play. Mrs. Virginia Smith, an actress associated with Moroney's theatre, was the author of a play entitled All Hail! To the "Stars and Bars," or Ho! Ye Dixie Boys. The play was presented at least twice in the Fort Smith Theatre. One performance was before June 19, 1861, and the second was on the evening of June 20. On June 19 the paper states:

There will be a performance at the Theatre tomorrow night. Mrs. Virginia Smith's great political farce will be reproduced. To witness this piece is the greatest treat of the season. It embraces all the sentiments of the Southern Confederacy, at the same time putting forth a variety of wit and genuine Negro Melody and philosophy seldom if ever seen. Mrs. Smith deserves great credit for the efforts to please the people, and placing a genuine picture of the true domestic happiness of the Southern plantation.¹²⁹

The following day the advertisement for this performance included the fact that fifteen volunteers were going to "go through the great 'Dixie Drill.'" Mrs. Mattie Pennoyer, an actress associated with the Little Rock Theatre in 1859, was in the Fort Smith Theatre at this time.¹³⁰ The advertisement promised that Mrs. Pennoyer would not only give a

¹²⁷Herndon, op. cit., pp. 281-282. ¹²⁸Ibid., p. 282.

¹²⁹Fort Smith Daily Times and Herald, June 19, 1861.

¹³⁰Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat, September 28, 1859.

political speech on that evening, but would also recite "Our Southern Banner," and perform in "the inimitable farce of Attic Lodges." Aside from a benefit for Mrs. Smith that was announced for the evening of June 22,¹³¹ no further mention is made of this series of performances.

On June 27, a benefit was announced for S. H. Hubbard, to take place on the evening of June 29, 1861. Hubbard was the recipient of this benefit because he had "kindly volunteered his services for the last three or four performances of the Thespian Club. . . ." The Club and the Moroneys offered him this favor, and hoped that Hubbard would "receive a bumper."¹³²

How long the theatre continued operation is not known. During the Christmas Season of 1861 it was reported that in spite of the blockade of eastern goods the season was far from dull. "There were dances and dinners in many homes and plays at Morany's [sic] Theatre."¹³³ This is the final mention of any theatrical entertainments in northwest Arkansas before the war laid waste many parts of the region.

VI. SUMMARY

From 1840 to 1862 northwest Arkansas was visited by at least nine professional theatrical companies: the company from the Little Rock Theatre in 1840; The Newtons in 1841; The Dykes in 1843; Scott's Theatre

¹³¹Fort Smith Daily Times and Herald, June 19, 1861.

¹³²Ibid., June 27, 1861.

¹³³Ibid., January 2, 1862, quoted in Patton, op. cit., pp. 127-28.

in 1858; Nick Moroney's troupes in 1859, 1860, and 1861; Mulholland and Huntley's barnstorming troupe which visited Greenwood, Van Buren, and Fayetteville in 1859; and E. D. Palmer's venture in Van Buren the same year. Others possibly occurred and were never recorded. The companies seemingly found a welcome in all towns of the region. Seldom was any criticism made of the actors or of the plays. This was a rare accomplishment for the theatre during a time when the moralists were quick to jump on all things which were "improper." The theatre was a favorite target in other regions but seemingly escaped such criticism in northwest Arkansas. Professional companies were slow to return following the war and were the exception rather than the rule for many years.

PART II

1865-1889

CHAPTER VIII

CIRCUSES: 1865-1889

Circuses slowly returned to the South following the Civil War. The first ones which did venture back into the war torn regions had great difficulty succeeding because the Southerners disliked the "Yankee Circuses."¹ More was required than parading wagons and an elephant to make the people forget their bitter defeat.

I. CIRCUS DEVELOPMENTS, 1865-1889

Most of the early post war circuses were still "wagon shows," and the distance which they could cover in a day was approximately twenty miles. A route book kept by W. C. Boyd, who traveled with the Cooper and Jackson Circus, shows the route which the show followed when it entered the state in 1880.² In northwest Arkansas the circus played in many small settlements as well as in the large towns. The exact day to day schedule for this show can be taken as typical for most wagon shows which visited the region.³ This circus was in northwest Arkansas from

¹Earl Chapin May, The Circus from Rome to Ringling (New York: Duffield and Green, 1932), p. 92.

²W. C. Boyd, "Route Book: Van Amburgh Circus, 1871-1879; Cooper and Jackson Circus, 1880-1882," unpublished manuscript in the Harry Hertzberg Circus Collection, San Antonio Public Library, San Antonio, Texas.

³See Appendix A, p. 309.

September 23, when it entered the state at Bloomfield in Benton County, until October 10, when it went on down the river from Dardanelle. This was a total of seventeen days in the region, and would have given almost all residents a chance to catch at least one performance along the route.

The major development of the circuses in the post-war decades was the discovery of the advantages of rail travel over the horse drawn wagons. Many managers learned that rail travel allowed the circus to pass the smaller towns and play in larger cities, where the appearances were more lucrative.⁴ By the mid 1880's most of the major circuses traveled on the railroads.⁵

The completion of the Fort Smith-Little Rock Railroad in 1876 allowed the first railroad shows to enter the region. The first such show probably was the W. W. Cole Circus which appeared in November, 1876, in Russellville and Van Buren.⁶ This circus started to travel by rail in 1873.⁷ It was one of the earliest of all rail shows and was the first circus to play in many western towns "when its train pressed on the heels of rail builders."⁸ The first circus in the region which

⁴George L. Chindahl, A History of the Circus in America (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1959), p. 27.

⁵Ibid., pp. 113-114.

⁶Russellville Democrat, October 26, 1876; Van Buren Argus, November 2 and 9, 1876; Van Buren Press, October 24, 1876.

⁷C. G. Sturdivant, "W. W. Cole," The White Tops, III (October, 1929), 5.

⁸John Durant and Alice Durant, Pictorial History of the American Circus (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1957), p. 313.

advertised as a railroad show was S. H. Barrett and Company's Great Pacific Railroad Show in 1881.⁹ By the end of the 1880's most of the circuses visiting the region traveled by rail. This development resulted in the decrease in the number of stops which the circuses made in the region. The small towns lost their annual show and the citizens of these communities had to travel to Fort Smith, Russellville, or Fayetteville to see the circuses each year.

II. THE CIRCUSES WHICH VISITED THE REGION, 1865-1889

The first circus to visit northwest Arkansas after the Civil War was probably Lake's Hippolympiad and Mammoth Circus. This show advertised to appear at Van Buren and Fort Smith in October, 1867. William Lake, the owner and manager of this circus, was not unknown to the audiences of the region for he and his wife, Agness, had visited the area with Rockwell and Company's Equestrian Circus in 1848.¹⁰ The fact that no report of a performance exists might be blamed on the reluctance of the press to chart the appearance of a "Yankee" company so soon after the close of the war.

Opton Brothers Great Southern Circus

The first definite circus performance following the war was by

⁹Fayetteville Sentinel, October 12, 1881.

¹⁰See Chapter III, pp. 55-57.

the Orton Brothers Great Southern Circus in April, 1870.¹¹ Both the Fort Smith and Fayetteville papers record the visit. An interesting fact is that the word "Southern" was quite prominent in the advertisements.

Dan Rice and The Damsel

During the twenty-five year period from 1865 to 1890 only one circus manager brought a showboat circus to the region. In the 1870's Dan Rice made three trips into the Arkansas River valley. These appearances were made on board his sternwheeler, Damsel, in 1874, 1876, and 1878. Dan Rice's fortunes were low during this time for he lost a considerable amount of money in the panic of 1873,¹² but he remained a favorite with the circus audiences. One editor speaks words of warm praise for Rice, "who, through many scenes of prosperity and adversity is still in the field to entertain and amuse the public,"¹³ Following the visit on the Arkansas River in 1878, the boat made a trip up the Missouri River, hit a snag, and burned near Decatur, Nebraska.¹⁴

William Washington Cole's Circus

Another frequent visiting company was the previously mentioned

¹¹Fort Smith Weekly Herald, April 9, 1870; Fayetteville Democrat, April 16, 1870.

¹²May, op. cit., p. 66.

¹³Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, March 1, 1878.

¹⁴Philip Graham, Showboats: The History of an American Institution (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 29.

railroad show of William Washington Cole. His circus started in 1872 and lasted for fourteen years.¹⁵ While not as large as some of the other traveling shows, it "always presented a high-grade performance and a good menagerie, and earned a large fortune for its proprietor."¹⁶ Cole's enterprise first came to northwest Arkansas in November, 1876 and was billed as "W. W. Cole's Great New York and New Orleans Zoological and Equestrian Exposition."¹⁷

Cole returned in 1882 as "W. W. Cole's Circus, Theatre and Menagerie."¹⁸ The following year the company again returned simply as "W. W. Cole's New Colossal Shows."¹⁹ Cole's final visit was in October, 1886, when the company played at Fort Smith and Russellville.²⁰ The Russellville Democrat, following the appearance of the circus, wrote: "Cole's Circus company sunk about \$1500 here Wednesday. The rain, hard times, and good sense of the people did it."²¹ At the end of this season the Cole company dissolved and the equipment was sold at

¹⁵Chindahl, op. cit., p. 245.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁷Russellville Democrat, October 26, 1876; Van Buren Argus, November 2, 1876.

¹⁸Russellville Democrat, November 9, 1882.

¹⁹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, April 18, and 25, 1883; Fort Smith, Wheeler's Independent, April 18, 1883.

²⁰Fort Smith Elevator, October 8, 1886.

²¹Russellville Democrat, loc. cit.

auction.²² Perhaps the bad spell of weather in Arkansas was partly to blame for the failure.

Other Circuses

Many of the circuses which appeared in the region were well-known throughout the United States:²³ the Van Amburgh Circus in 1877; the Cooper Jackson's Circus in 1880 and 1882; and two Sell's brother's enterprises, the S. H. Barrett Circus in 1881 and 1887, and the Sell's Brothers Fifty-Cage, Four-Ring Circus in 1884. This last show was a railroad circus and catered mainly to mid-western farm communities.²⁴

The names of the circuses changed from year to year as did the alliances of the circus owners. For instance, in 1870 Hemmings, Cooper, and Whitby's Great Circus and Menagerie came to the region, and two years later James E. Cooper, the middle partner in the 1870 company, returned with his Grand Consolidated Menagerie, Museum and Circus. This title gave way when Cooper became partners with James A. Bailey and the circus was called Cooper and Bailey Circus.²⁵ In 1875 this new combination was in Dardanelle and Russellville as Cooper and Bailey's Great

²²Chindahl, op. cit., p. 102.

²³A complete listing of the circuses which performed and/or advertised in the region is in Appendix A.

²⁴Durant and Durant, op. cit., p. 320.

²⁵Chindahl, op. cit., p. 97.

International Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Grecian Circus and Calisthenic.²⁶

In 1888 one of the most famous circuses in America, the Barnum and Bailey company, came to three northwest Arkansas towns. The owners split their show in half and played on the same day in Russellville and Fort Smith. This stirred some mutterings among the citizens of Russellville for they feared that they would not get much of a show.²⁷ The performances seemed to be well enough attended at Russellville, however, even though Fort Smith got the other half of the circus.²⁸

III. LOCAL RECEPTION TO THE VISITING CIRCUSES, 1865-1890

There were few "luke-warm" reactions to the circuses. Some of them met such apathy that they were only slightly mentioned in the press. Others had such opposition from the press that the appearance of the advertisements for the circus within the same paper as the strong statements of animosity, suggested that the editors did not mind biting the hand which was "feeding" them. Still others were well received and commended by the editors.

In some instances two editors might take entirely opposite

²⁶Russellville Democrat, November 18, 1875; Dardanelle, Arkansas Independent, November 26, 1875, and December 3, 1875.

²⁷Russellville Democrat, September 20, 1888.

²⁸Ibid., October 4, 1888.

stands on a circus. One might see it as a success and the other call it a "humbug." In 1885 the editor of the Fort Smith Weekly Elevator openly decried the fact that only the daily papers carried the advertisements for John B. Dorris's Circus.²⁹ After this, his opposition to that particular show took the form of refusing to print even the slightest word about the circus.

Opposition to the Circus

A warm welcome did not always greet the circuses which visited the region. This was not just a local occurrence, but a nationwide one.³⁰ When the circuses played in the larger cities and towns they did not usually have the animosity of the community. The smaller towns were a different problem, and they compensated for the unconcern of the larger towns. One circus man offers the following reasons for the opposition encountered in these smaller places:

Activities of crooked camp followers, charges that circuses drain a town of all its cash and leave nothing behind but trouble, a revulsion on the part of small-town residents against an invasion, if only for a day, of a thousand "slickers" from the circus--these reasons may explain the hostility.³¹

Northwest Arkansas was no exception and opposition on all three counts was present: local economics, circus dishonesty, and the clanishness of the natives.

²⁹Fort Smith Elevator, November 13, 1885.

³⁰Dexter W. Fellows and Andrew A. Freeman, This Way to the Big Show, The Life of Dexter Fellows (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), p. 119.

³¹Ibid.

Local economics. The major complaint which the newspapers made was that the circuses took cash from the local economy. Upon announcing the coming of Orton's Circus in 1870, the Fayetteville Democrat printed the following warning to possible circus fans:

Remember that every dollar you contribute to these humbugs, is that much money taken out of the country, and what are you benefitted. We think the sooner these humbugs are put down, the better it will be for the country.³²

The newspapers at Dardanelle always took their opposition seriously. The editor of the Arkansas Independent overcame his reluctance for mentioning a circus in 1875, by writing about the damage which it had done to the economy. Following the November performance of the Cooper, Bailey and Company's Menagerie and Circus the following article appeared:

The big Circus and Menagerie has come and gone. The people, ditto. By thousands they went to see the show. Purse strings lost their grip. With depleted pockets the masses have returned home. Half of them are figuring every night until low twelve, trying to ascertain how much wiser they are and see if their increased wisdom is proportioned to their expenditures. The other half, have already given up the problem, as too deep for them to solve and may now be seen near the twilight hour as the dusky shade of evening veils the surrounding landscape in the somber hued mantle, emblematic of death and the grave, sitting out on the wood pile wishing they "hadn't went."

The showmen have gone on their way rejoicing, with well lined pockets, swearing by Mahomet the prophet that Dardanelle is the showman's paradise.³³

If any reason at all could be found for not attending the circus, newspapers were sure to announce it. The Independent Arkansian of

³²Fayetteville Democrat, April 9, 1870.

³³Dardanelle Arkansas Independent, November 26, 1875.

Dardanelle printed the following tirade upon the notice of a coming circus.

Well, another circus is coming and everybody who can start track of a dollar will be on hand, to spend it. Cotton picking for that day will be suspended. Little debts due will have to stand over. Hard times may have been knocking at the door all the year, but he must stand aside on the 8th because the children want to see the animals. It don't [sic] matter whether there is meat in the house or not, we must go to the show. Who cares for Chattel mortgages covering the crop and the horses and the cow, when a circus is around. Let the deadly incubus hang to sap out the life blood. Let honest debts run on. Let the sugar and coffee stay out. Let want pinch in all its severity for our recklessness, for we are bound to squander every cent we can get hold of between this and the 8th, on the show. The salary due the preacher can go unpaid. The school teacher can go without his money. The doctor's bill can be stood off. The repairs on the church can be postponed. The school house can go without a stove, and the broken window glass can stay out to let the fresh winter air in. The children can grow up without schooling and Christians can get along without preaching but all must go to the show. Watch the throngs as they crowd the ticket wagon, and then file into the circus tent. Look at them as they sit on the seats laughing at the trick mule and the clown's stale jokes, and then think of the pitiful tales these same folks have put up to be furnished with meat at 20¢ per pound, and bread at an outrageous price to make their crop, which is not yet paid for. Look at the modest ladies, how they look and simper at the bare legs of the female riders. Come and see which church in Dardanelle has the best representation. It will be nip and tuck between the Methodist and Baptist, with the other good Christians of the town bringing up the rear along with the Jews. It will be a good time to call the roll of the Sunday-schools to get track of delinquent scholars. Everybody will be there and it will be a good time for delinquent subscribers to this paper to pay us what they owe.³⁴

There is no actual way of knowing exactly how much money the circuses made in the towns which they visited. In 1882 the Cooper and Jackson Circus was reported to have taken "three thousand dollars in Yell

³⁴Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, November 3, 1882.

County money and left nothing instead."³⁵ When the Barnum-Bailey Circus played in Fayetteville in 1888 the editor of the Fayetteville Democrat estimated that Barnum "scooped in about twelve thousand dollars" in the one day the show was in town.³⁶

Circus dishonesty. The objections to the circuses were not all based on the bleeding of the cash from the populace. Other valid reasons were given for some of the warnings which the papers handed out. The editors continually advised that circus people were not always honest in their dealings with the local citizenry. The Russellville Democrat makes the observation that "a mob of thieves, pickpockets and disreputable characters" come with every circus.³⁷

When W. W. Cole's circus appeared in Van Buren, numerous men were swindled by placing confidence in one of the traveling showmen. The paper states: "We saw one poor fellow looking for the man who took his ten dollar bill, 'all in fun, you know!'"³⁸

The city of Russellville was presented with a special problem when Dutton's Great Southern Circus attempted to evade the city license.³⁹ The managers had simply changed the name of the performance

³⁵Dardanelle Post, November 9, 1882.

³⁶Fayetteville Democrat, September 28, 1888.

³⁷Russellville Democrat, September 6, 1888.

³⁸Van Buren Argus, November 2, 1876.

³⁹Russellville Democrat, July 8, 1880.

which they gave. Instead of a circus performance, a presentation which called for a high tax, the company gave a lower taxed "variety performance." As this was not thought legal, the manager was arrested and fined by the magistrates. The editor of the paper did feel that the performance was good and if they had not attempted to "beat" the county and corporation out of the licenses, the circus would have made a good impression in the community.⁴⁰

In Russellville later in the same year, the Cooper and Jackson Circus did pay the fifty dollar fee into the city treasury, but it was characterized as a "humbugging crowd, made up of fakrs [sic] money-snatchers, and cheats. . . ."⁴¹ In the same town in 1887, the paper reports that two homes were robbed while Barrett's Circus was in town.⁴² One of the victims of the robbery was paid twenty dollars by the circus manager, but the other man was unable to recover any of his goods or damages from the circus company. The paper warned that Barrett's Circus was "followed by a dangerous set of thieves and gamblers."⁴³

Jake Posey, a wagon driver for the S. H. Barrett Circus during its visit to Arkansas in 1887, stated that a number of thieves were with the show, and when they ran out of "rubes" to rob, would rob each other. Posey said that the "grift" (circus talk for various dishonest

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., October 11, 1880.

⁴²Ibid., October 26, 1887.

⁴³Ibid.

practices) was so lucrative that year that he did not need to pick up his pay check until he left the show seven months later.⁴⁴

The last event of this sort reported in the region was in 1888, when some members of a circus were arrested for conducting a lottery in Russellville.⁴⁵

Social clanishness of the small towns. The tight knit quality of the small towns was difficult to break through. Sometimes this resentment was shown through violence. During the period it was common practice for the local toughs to give the circuses a hard time when they arrived.⁴⁶ It was not unusual for the sideropes of the bigtops to be cut, or the circus horses to be poisoned.⁴⁷ These attacks pulled the circus people closer together, for they required a crude organization for defense.⁴⁸ When a circus man saw trouble start he called "Hey Rube!" which meant "that the 'rubes' were causing trouble."⁴⁹ At this signal the show people would grab tent stakes and drive off the attackers. It was hardly a fair fight for there were "no better rough-and-tumble fighters than canvasmen, stake drivers, and other laborers carried by circuses."⁵⁰

⁴⁴Jake Posey, Last of the 40-Horse Drivers (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), p. 26.

⁴⁵Russellville Democrat, April 12, 1887.

⁴⁶Fellows and Freeman, loc. cit.

⁴⁷May, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴⁸Fellows and Freeman, loc. cit.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

During this period in northwest Arkansas, no record exists of any violence perpetrated by the circus men against the local people, or of any local toughs who started fights with the circus men. The only violence which was associated with any circus was reported in Fort Smith in 1880. Two drunk men, one a young Cherokee and the other a Negro, had a shooting affray just outside the tent of the Cooper and Jackson Circus. Five or six shots were rapidly exchanged between the two men, and both men died a few days later. The paper states: "The immediate cause of the quarrel is unknown, as there does not appear to have been anyone near the men at the commencement, but whiskey was, in all probability, the first cause."⁵¹

Popularity of the Circus

A generalization that all circuses which visited the area employed dishonesty would not be fair. Many of the circuses were praised by the newspapermen and the citizens alike. The performances which they gave were credited as being well worth the money. When Hemmings, Cooper and Whitby's Circus played in Fort Smith in 1870, Valentine Dell, the editor of the Fort Smith New Era notes:

The show has been here, and the young and the old have patronized it, and with few exceptions, have come away delighted. We decidedly think it is as good a show as has visited us for sometime.⁵²

When the E. T. Basye Circus showed in Fort Smith, Dell notes:

⁵¹Fort Smith Elevator, October 8, 1880.

⁵²Fort Smith New Era, September 29, 1870.

"Many visitors from the rural districts were in and our city presented a lively appearance during the day, merchants, as well as the circus doing a thriving business."⁵³ This was one indication that, the circuses attracted many shoppers into the stores, a fact which could not have drawn much criticism from the local businessmen. The Fort Smith Elevator also praised this circus as being out of the ordinary.⁵⁴

The newspapers seldom published "reviews" of the circus performances. In 1880, however, two lengthy reviews of the Cooper and Jackson's Great European Circus were printed in Fort Smith papers. The writer in Wheeler's Independent describes the appeal of the circus:

When the band struck up, the work tools were thrown aside, books closed and everybody turned out to view the exciting scene. Cotton picking was suspended, and people from the country were in by the hundreds. There is, perhaps, no source of amusement so gratifying to all classes as a circus and menagerie; and to hear the quaint soliloquies of the spell-bound citizen as he beholds the wild beasts from distant climes. There stood cousin Jake and Brother Sandy, cousin Rebecca Jane and Sally Ann, each in turn had their say about the roar of the lion and the snort of the elephant, while no small amount of disappointment was manifest at the absence of the ou-rang-outang,-- or the Arkansayer terms it, the "Ranka-tank!" But the chatter of the monkeys and the restlessness of the Hyena, big snakes, etc., amply repaid the sightseer for the lack of other curiosities. The circus was simply grand and glorious, as the crowded pavilion fully attested.⁵⁵

The other review is in the Fort Smith New Era and is quite lengthy. It is somewhat less idealized than the first review, but

⁵³Ibid., November 27, 1878.

⁵⁴Fort Smith Elevator, November 29, 1878.

⁵⁵Fort Smith New Era, October 6, 1880.

nonetheless interesting for the writer's rather frank observations. From it we can gain an impression of what it must have been like to go to one of these traveling shows.

A circus day in a border town like Fort Smith is one long to be remembered. Here the rural lads and lassies come into town in droves to see the elephant and feast on ginger bread and bolognas. They came from fifty miles from surrounding counties and the Indian Territory to witness the tarnationist biggest show that has exhibited in Fort Smith since the last one. Thursday last, the day on which Cooper & Jackson's Circus spread its canvas in this place was one of the most lovely days that ever favored a clown and his trick donkey. There were two canvasses for the main show--one for the menagerie and museum and the other the arena. I had just arrived in the city and out of curiosity I wandered around to the circus. After seeing the show I stayed to the Negro minstrel show out of revenge. I was a little disappointed in the menagerie, because I had depended on that and the museum for the bulk of my happiness on this occasion. The most noted specimens of the forest and jungle were those which appeared on the bills but not in the cages. I cast a few reproachful glances upon the specimens that good living and virtuous precepts had preserved to such a good old age, and passed on to the main tent.

When I got inside the large tent I was surprised. A sea of faces spread out before and around me. The reserved seats and ring seats were crowded, and yet the people kept coming in like sinners to a big revival. I had about made up my mind to stand up and take in the show so long as there was standing room left, when a coarse voice behind me cried, "Down in front." I stepped over a few paces to the left and had struck a very graceful and easy attitude when some gentleman seated on a peanut box in rear of the lemonade stand, observed that "He couldn't see through me quite so well as glass." Just then the boy who was selling reserved seats observed that there was plenty of room yet left in that part of the canvass, and I bought a ticket. As it wasn't numbered I had a good time finding the seat I had engaged, but I crowded in on the end of one of them and decided to set there if I did look like a young rooster on a rickety hen roost. After getting well balanced on about two inches of the seat, I took in the entire canvass at a glance as it were. It was one mass of suffocation, fun and sweat. Positively, I don't think I ever saw so large an attendance at a prayer meeting, and I've been to lots of them.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Fort Smith New Era, October 6, 1880.

When the performance started the writer had great difficulty seeing the action in the ring. He states that he had "an excellent view of the tent, and, once in a while of the clown's head, which loomed up like a wart on a popular man's nose." He continues that he was aware that something must be going on in the ring, but he was at a loss most of the time to tell what it was. He concludes his experience under the big top by stating:

The enthusiasm was really sublime during the performance. What it would have been if the whole audience could have seen what was going on in the ring, the human mind fails to calculate.⁵⁷

The writer followed his visit to the circus performance by attending the minstrel show which followed. Minstrel shows were common with the circuses at this time, and such a show was just another way to get the money out of the hands of the curious citizens.

IV. SUMMARY

On the whole the circuses which played in northwest Arkansas during the period from 1865 to 1889 found success for their efforts. The fact that the audiences were continually referred to as "vast numbers of people," or "the thousands" indicates that the popularity with the average citizens held fast throughout the twenty-five year span.

With the exception of 1871, 1873, and 1879, northwest Arkansas was visited by at least one circus each year after 1870. During the years 1870, 1876, 1878, 1880, 1883, 1884, 1886, and 1888, at least two

⁵⁷Ibid., October 6, 1880.

companies advertised each year in the region. The two most active years were 1887, when three circuses exhibited, and 1882, when four shows appeared, three of them in November.

From the earliest post war wagon show to the giant Barnum and Bailey railroad show, northwest Arkansas had a variety of circuses to view. No matter what the opposition or the praise was, the individual circus viewer of the region watched with awe the glitter and excitement of the big-top.

CHAPTER IX

MINSTRELS: 1865-1889

The special heyday of minstrelsy in the United States occurred in the decades from 1850 to 1870.¹ The completion of railroads following the war made it possible for companies to travel where they had never been able to go before, and minstrel troupes prospered on a national scale. In the period of national expansion following the war, minstrelsy "found at once its greatest prosperity as well as the forces that were slowly to lead to its disintegration and eventual collapse."² The purpose of this chapter is to present information concerning the minstrel companies that toured the region between 1865 and 1889, the amateur minstrel efforts, the performances, and the local reception afforded the performances.

I. THE PROFESSIONAL MINSTRELS

A variety of minstrel troupes toured the northwest region of Arkansas during the period from 1865 to 1889. The first company after the Civil War was the Empire Minstrels, performing in Fort Smith in

¹Carl Wittke, Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 65.

April, 1867.³ Few details are extant concerning the company, but it seemed to have pleased the audience.⁴

Another troupe came to Fort Smith in January, 1868, and the audiences were encouraged to attend, for nowhere could a weary hour "be whiled away more pleasantly."⁵

During the decade of the 1870's few professional minstrel troupes visited the region. The Southern Minstrels performed in Fayetteville,⁶ Fort Smith,⁷ and Van Buren.⁸ In May, 1870, Hamilton's Minstrels, "one of those traveling institutions known as negro shows," appeared in Fayetteville.⁹ The California Minstrels stopped in Fort Smith,¹⁰ Fayetteville,¹¹ and Van Buren in November, 1871.¹² Two other companies complete the roster of minstrel troupes for the decade: Captain Strayer's Minstrels in Fayetteville in April, 1874,¹³ and a

³Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, April 2 and 9, 1867.

⁴Ibid., April 9, 1867.

⁵Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 11, 1868.

⁶Fayetteville Democrat, March 12, 1870.

⁷Fort Smith New Era, March 23, 1870.

⁸Van Buren Press, March 29, 1870.

⁹Fayetteville Democrat, May 21, 1870.

¹⁰Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, November 16 and 18, 1871.

¹¹Fayetteville Democrat, November 11, 1871.

¹²Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 25, 1871.

¹³Fayetteville Democrat, April 4, 1874.

nameless minstrel company in Van Buren in November, 1878.¹⁴

The decade of the 1880's saw a greater number of troupes come, and many of these were large, nationally known touring minstrel shows. The prosperity of the American minstrel show during this time paralleled the movement within minstrel entertainment to get away from the prototypes upon which the art had been based. "Bigger and better" minstrel shows were the result of the "insatiable demand of the American public."¹⁵

The first minstrel show during the 1880's was the one with the Cooper and Jackson's Circus in September, 1880.¹⁶ Next the Lone Star or Texas Star Minstrels came to Fort Smith in October and November, 1880.¹⁷ This troupe was a "real Negro show, composed of colored people exclusively. . . ."¹⁸ The Callender Negro Minstrels, a company with "thirty-two persons in the troupe, all fine musicians and singers," appeared in Van Buren in November, 1883.¹⁹ The Callender troupe went

¹⁴Van Buren Argus, no date, quoted by the Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 11, 1878.

¹⁵Wittke, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁶Fort Smith New Era, October 6, 1880.

¹⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, October 20, 1880; Fort Smith New Era, November 3 and 10, 1880; Fort Smith Elevator, November 5, 1880.

¹⁸Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, October 20, 1880.

¹⁹Van Buren Press, November 3, 1883.

from Van Buren to Fort Smith, where it gave two performances.²⁰

In early February of 1884, Heywood's New York Mastodons were in Fayetteville,²¹ Van Buren,²² Fort Smith²³ and Russellville.²⁴ This troupe reportedly had twenty members and was pronounced "first class in its line."²⁵

The next troupe was the E. B. Brown Grand Consolidated Empire Minstrel Troupe. Its first reported show in the region was in Fort Smith in early March, and it was advertised with the traditional street parade and concert.²⁶ It was scheduled to go to Fayetteville later that month.²⁷ This company also was composed of twenty persons and came "highly recommended by the press" in the cities, where it had performed during that season.²⁸

In April of that year, the Fort Smith Daily Tribune announced that the Barlow, Wilson and Company Minstrels and the Callender Minstrels had been booked for the Academy of Music in the fall, but no records of

²⁰Fort Smith Elevator, November 9, 1883.

²¹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 6, 1884.

²²Van Buren Press, February 9, 1884.

²³Daily Fort Smith Tribune, February 6, 1884.

²⁴Russellville Democrat, February 14, 1884.

²⁵Ibid., February 7, 1884.

²⁶Daily Fort Smith Tribune, March 11, 1884.

²⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, March 5 and 12, 1884.

²⁸Ibid., March 5, 1884.

their performances are extant.²⁹ O'Brien's Southern Concert and Minstrel Troupe were in Fayetteville in May, 1885, and presented the audiences "two very pleasing entertainments."³⁰ In October, Heywood's Minstrels came back to Fayetteville for a second time, and James Heywood, the manager, was praised as a "man of many year's experience in the minstrel business" who "knows how to please the public."³¹ Heywood's company also played in Van Buren to a large house on the evening of October 6, 1885.³²

The Dude Minstrels toured the region in 1886. Referred to as "The Little Rock Dude Minstrels," the company played first in Russellville in early February,³³ and later in the month went to Van Buren, where they were welcomed by only a small house.³⁴ In April, 1886, the Baird Minstrels performed in Van Buren, where the street parade was pronounced "first rate, and the music grand."³⁵

The Heywood's Minstrels returned for the third time to the region in the fall of 1887, playing first to a full house in

²⁹Daily Fort Smith Tribune, April 5, 1884.

³⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, May 28, 1885.

³¹Ibid., October 8, 1885.

³²Van Buren Press, October 10, 1885.

³³Russellville Democrat, February 11, 1886.

³⁴Van Buren Press, February 20, 1886.

³⁵Ibid., April 3, 1886.

Fayetteville.³⁶ The company advertised a show in Van Buren for October 4, 1887,³⁷ and reports place it in Russellville on October 7, and Dardanelle on October 8.³⁸

Haverley's Mastodon Minstrels advertised for Wood's Opera House in Fayetteville on January 7, 1888.³⁹ Richards and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels came to Bentonville,⁴⁰ and advertised an engagement in Fayetteville in September of that year.⁴¹ The company appeared in Fort Smith on the evening of September 15 and featured Billy Kersands.⁴² Wilson's Minstrels performed in Fort Smith on the evening of November 8, 1888.⁴³ In early December, 1888, Orton's Minstrels met with success in Van Buren,⁴⁴ and were scheduled to go from there to Fayetteville.⁴⁵

The last company in the region in 1888 was The Famous Goodyear,

³⁶Fayetteville Democrat, October 7, 1887.

³⁷Van Buren Press, October 1, 1887.

³⁸Russellville Democrat, October 12, 1887.

³⁹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, January 3, 1888.

⁴⁰Bentonville Benton County Democrat, September 15, 1888.

⁴¹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 11, 1888.

⁴²Program dated September 15, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁴³Program dated November 8, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁴⁴Van Buren Press, December 8, 1888.

⁴⁵Fayetteville Democrat, December 7, 1888.

Cooke and Dillon's Minstrels, scheduled for Fayetteville on December 15; however, a program from the Grand Opera House indicates that the company was in Fort Smith on that evening.⁴⁶

In February of 1889, George Wilson's Minstrels appeared at the Grand Opera House in Fort Smith,⁴⁷ and was scheduled to go from there to Fayetteville.⁴⁸ This company advertised a cast of "Forty Minstrel Premiers," and the program was to be composed of "Modern and Refined Minstrelsy."⁴⁹ Later that year the Gem Variety Theatre in Fort Smith reportedly offered "a New Attraction in the shape of four colored Minstrels."⁵⁰ Toward the end of the year the Wilson's Minstrels returned to town and drew large audiences at the Grand Opera House on November 11, 1889.⁵¹

In the twenty-five year period the sizes of the companies varied from those with only a few members to the larger troupes which carried as many as forty performers with them. There were possibly other professional minstrel performances in the region during this time which were not recorded, but the above troupes were probably the most important companies.

⁴⁶Program dated December 15, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁴⁷Program dated February 25, 1889 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁴⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 26, 1889.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Fort Smith Elevator, November 8, 1889.

⁵¹Ibid., November 15, 1889.

II. AMATEUR MINSTREL EFFORTS

Few efforts were made by the amateurs during this time to produce minstrel shows. The Russellville Cornet Band presented a minstrel performance in April, 1877, for the first reported amateur attempt at this form of entertainment.⁵²

In 1883 the misfortunes of a circus proprietor led to a minstrel show in Russellville. The Great New York Show, a gymnastic and acrobatic exhibition, came to Dardanelle for a week in late November, 1882. The show had slowly lost its members over the past few weeks and at last went "emphatically 'busted.'"⁵³ The proprietor, Montanio, his wife, and child stayed in the area, and in early 1883 were reported to have prompted an amateur minstrel performance in Russellville.⁵⁴ No further information is available about this resourceful showman.

In 1887 a troupe of home talent from Fayetteville, called the Caldwell Minstrel and Comedy Company, played in West Fork and announced that it planned to tour Washington County.⁵⁵

In Fort Smith a group of local men organized an amateur troupe in 1888 and took the name of "The Charity Blacks." The first appearance of this group was at the Grand Opera House on October 31, 1888, and was

⁵²Russellville Democrat, April 12, 1877.

⁵³Dardanelle Post, December 7, 1882.

⁵⁴Ibid., January 18, 1883.

⁵⁵Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 27, 1887.

for the benefit of St. John's Hospital.⁵⁶ The following year the "Charity Blacks" performed not only in Fort Smith, but also in Van Buren.⁵⁷ The company went to Greenwood in May, 1889,⁵⁸ and traveled as far as Fayetteville on Friday, June 25, to entertain a delighted audience.⁵⁹

These rare instances are probably only a few of the amateur minstrel efforts which took place in the region. While many amateur concerts included blackface-type entertainments, they were only as one small part of the program and did not follow the format of regular minstrel shows.

III. THE PERFORMANCES

The exact content of the performances of most of the minstrel troupes is not known. The few programs remaining indicate that traditional Tambo and Bones dialogue with the "Conversationalist" or "Interlocutor" was always one of the main aspects of the presentation. The programs also included songs, burlesques and dances. When the Empire Minstrels appeared in Fort Smith in 1867, the program included "Tragedy,

⁵⁶Program dated October 21, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁵⁷Fort Smith Elevator, April 26, 1889.

⁵⁸Ibid., May 31, 1889.

⁵⁹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, July 2, 1889.

Pantomime, Dances, Songs, etc."⁶⁰ One advertisement for the Callender Minstrels states:

There are thirty-two persons in the troupe, all fine musicians and singers. Their programme is filled with choice selections of music, pathetic, sentimental and comic. Their display of the Black Zouaves in dress parade and varying drill is spoken of by the press as highly attractive. Among their specialists are the eccentric and grotesque Billy Kersands and the splendid quartette, Stanton, Harris, Johnson and Grimes.⁶¹

Another advertisement for a minstrel troupe includes the information that even the most "sensitive lady" can listen "with the greatest propriety," to the "plaintive ditties, enjoy the Ethiopianism, laugh at the wonderful impersonations, and go into ecstasies over the music and nonsensicalities."⁶²

In the case of some of the minstrels, the details of the program were never reported. One typical report about the Heywood's Minstrels states: "The programme presented about the usual features."⁶³

The program of the Goodyear, Cooke and Dillon's Minstrels in Fort Smith on December 15, 1888, included a great variety of acts. The traditional Tambo and Bones interchange opened the show, and was followed by a "March Militaire." The "second Edition of the Comedians" featured more of the Tambo and Bones patter and was followed by a dance act entitled "The Parlor Clog." Next came the Leech Brothers, banjo

⁶⁰Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, April 9, 1867.

⁶¹Fort Smith Elevator, November 2, 1883.

⁶²Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 27, 1887.

⁶³Fayetteville Democrat, September 30, 1887

wizards, who were billed as "the most pleasing and novel act on the Minstrel Stage." Subsequently there were more dialogues, songs, and dances, and the program concluded with two skits, one entitled "Rehearsal in the Woods," and the second, "Somnambulistic Reveries." The "Rehearsal in the Woods" featured "the renowned Male Soprano, Ellsworth Cook."⁶⁴ Cook had been in the region some years before with the Heywood Mastodons, and one reviewer wrote of him: "He certainly possesses a remarkable soprano voice."⁶⁵

IV. "THE VICISSITUDES OF MINSTREL LIFE IN ARKANSAS"

Not all of the minstrel companies were received kindly in northwest Arkansas. When the Heywood's Mastodon Minstrel Company played in Dardanelle in 1887, some of its members acted "very disgracefully" and "were the recipients of pretty rough treatment at the hands of some of the boys and ordered to leave the town at once."⁶⁶ The management of the company fired them and they left the troupe. The editor surmised that they would "doubtless have a tale to unfold to willing listeners 'up in God's country' concerning the vicissitudes of minstrel life in Arkansas."⁶⁷

In addition to the above incident, some companies of minstrels

⁶⁴Program dated December 15, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

⁶⁵Russellville Democrat, February 14, 1884.

⁶⁶Ibid., October 12, 1887.

⁶⁷Ibid.

brought disfavor on themselves because of poor financial practices. In 1870 the Southern Minstrels performed in Fayetteville, Van Buren and Fort Smith. The Van Buren Press notified all its readers that the Fayetteville Democrat had not been paid for work done for the minstrel troupe. The article also noted that the company's board bill had not yet been paid in Van Buren.⁶⁸

In 1886 the Dude Minstrels were able to get away from Russellville only by paying their bills with their effects. The paper states:

The Dude Minstrels, like a good many other things, fell upon hard luck here Saturday last. Expressing it in the vernacular, they were snowed under, so we were told, their effects being attached for transportation, bills, etc.⁶⁹

The fortunes of the Dude Minstrels did not improve, and when the company played in Van Buren the next day the members' baggage was attached to pay the hotel bills. The editor of the Van Buren Press chides them: "Better put up the 'fiddle and the bow' and get down to work."⁷⁰

Other companies probably had a hard time in the region also, but the three listed above were the ones reported in the press.

In spite of the above bad examples, the minstrel troupes which visited the region between 1865 and 1889 were generally accorded a friendly welcome. Because the editors of the newspapers in the region were reluctant to give much space to traveling minstrel shows, few

⁶⁸Van Buren Press, March 29, 1870.

⁶⁹Russellville Democrat, February 11, 1886.

⁷⁰Van Buren Press, February 13, 1886.

critical accounts of performances are extant. As a general rule, if the company gave satisfaction to its audience it was considered successful and received a line or two of praise. The Southern Minstrels that played in Fayetteville are said to have been "better than the generality of traveling shows." The audience went away fully satisfied "and they had got the worth of their four-bits." The editor then encourages others to attend: "If you want to laugh and grow fat, go see the Minstrels."⁷¹ The California Minstrels appeared in Fort Smith the following year and had a pleasant reception. The Tri-Weekly Herald states: ". . . for a traveling troupe they come nearer the mark of what is on the bills than anything we have lately seen, and have given universal satisfaction so far as we have seen and heard."⁷² This same company was praised the following week because the actors were steady, their actions were chaste, and because "racy and rich scenes are nightly presented by them."⁷³

One of the highest compliments which could be paid to a minstrel troupe was to call it "chaste." The Brown's Minstrel Company was lauded by the Daily Fort Smith Tribune in 1884. "One particular merit of this company is the high-toned character of their performances. There is nothing vulgar, the jokes being all clean and free from the double entendres so frequently used."⁷⁴

⁷¹Fayetteville Democrat, March 12, 1870.

⁷²Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, November 14, 1871.

⁷³Ibid., November 18, 1871.

⁷⁴Daily Fort Smith Tribune, March 11, 1884.

Gorton's Minstrels received a good notice when they came to Van Buren in 1888. The Van Buren Press states:

They played to a very fair house, and deserved it, for they are a very strong combination, and were appreciated as was shown by the applause given them. The music was very good as was also the dancing. The jokes were new and spicy. Taken all through it was a very good troupe and they were well received. Everybody went home well satisfied at having spent an evening in good hearty laughter.⁷⁵

On the other hand, the comments of the press were not always favorable to the shows. The Fayetteville Democrat reports the following about the Hamilton's Minstrels in 1870.

Our city was "bored" on Wednesday and Thursday nights by another of those traveling institutions known as negro shows. "Hamilton's Minstrels," we believe is the style of this firm. About twenty-five of our fun-loving citizens, mostly colored, patronized the show and we are told that it is a regular "sell out."⁷⁶

Van Buren was visited by a minstrel show in 1878, and the Van Buren Argus says that it was "the poorest show ever exhibited on the American continent."⁷⁷

The Heywood Minstrel troupe which was in the region in the fall of 1887 and ran into trouble in Dardanelle, is criticized harshly by the Russellville Democrat.

The performance of the so-called "Heywood Mastodons" at Luker and Davis' Opera house last Friday evening was exceedingly stale and unprofitable, and filled the large audience with a big disgust. During a very few specialty acts, the entire performance dropped to the level of mediocrity, and was entirely unworthy the

⁷⁵Van Buren Press, December 8, 1888.

⁷⁶Fayetteville Democrat, May 21, 1870.

⁷⁷Van Buren Argus, no date, cited by the Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 11, 1878.

name and fame of the celebrated amusement purveyor whose name they bear. It is evidently a snide affair that will soon disband, and the sooner the better.⁷⁸

The critics seemed to wax more eloquent in their adverse criticism than in their praise.

Taken as a group, however, the minstrel companies were pleasantly received and were quite popular with the theatre-going citizens. One advertisement contains an attempt to describe the appeal of the minstrel shows.

There is a kind of charm about a good negro minstrel show which, while none of us can describe, nevertheless exists to nearly every man, woman and child in the country. They all like it, whether farmer, mechanic, merchant or professional man. The performance is better than a circus and more to the general taste than either the drama or opera.⁷⁹

V. SUMMARY

During the twenty-five year period from 1865 to 1889 northwest Arkansas was visited by almost twenty-five professional minstrel companies, but witnessed only a few amateur performances. The company that came to the region most frequently was the Heywood Minstrels. After its initial appearance in 1884, it returned two other times before 1890. With some exceptions troupes were well received. The programs presented were typical of that day, and the audiences in the region were generally pleased. The minstrel shows that traveled into the region during this

⁷⁸Russellville Democrat, October 28, 1887.

⁷⁹Fort Smith Elevator, November 2, 1883.

time gave the citizens opportunities to view one of the most typical and popular types of entertainment in America in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER X

AMATEUR DRAMATIC ACTIVITY, 1865-1889

Amateur entertainments were one of the first forms of amusement to appear after the war. When the inhabitants of the towns settled back to a normal routine and the hardships of the war became a thing of the past, various amateur efforts again became a part of community life. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss such amateur activities in the region from 1865 through 1889. These activities will be discussed according to the types of amateur groups, the types of performances, the plays presented, the production of the plays, and the reception of the amateurs in the region.

I. THE ORGANIZATIONS

The reasons prompting the amateur efforts were as varied as the resulting organizations. Frequently groups developed because of a desire to produce a play solely for public presentation. Many times, however, this was not the case, and the amateur organizations came into being in order to raise funds for a specific purpose or to present a vivid moral lesson to the wayward.

Amateur Dramatic Clubs

Numerous clubs were organized specifically for the production of plays and the recreation involved in theatrical activity. As a

general rule, they sustained their vitality for only a few performances.

During the periods of inactivity the newspapers of the region frequently mentioned the need for a "Dramatic Club" among "the young folks of the town." When one was organized, the press gave it good coverage and encouragement. A group of men in Van Buren organized a dramatic club in 1876, and the Van Buren Argus contains an estimate of the value of such an effort.

It is very desirable that the dramatic talent of Van Buren be developed, for the amusement of our people, as well as for the benefit it will be to the participaters [sic] in the plays presented. If proper attention is given it is a good school of elocution and teaches self-confidence. It affords constant amusement, far superior to anything else we can have here, and serves to keep our young men from forming bad habits, by offering them the means of spending an evening pleasantly at the rehearsals.¹

When the amateur dramatic clubs were formed they selected various names. Many were referred to just as "The Amateurs," but more official titles were selected by some groups. In 1869 a group in Van Buren was called The Van Buren Amateur Theatrical Association.² Variations on this title were used frequently during the period, although no indication is given that the original club lasted more than one production. The Excelsior Amateur Dramatic Troupe was active in Van Buren during 1875.³

In Fort Smith various titles were used, although many groups

¹Van Buren Argus, March 16, 1876.

²Van Buren Press, January 5, 1869.

³Fort Smith New Era, June 23, 1875.

had no names. In 1868 a Theatrical Corps was formed among the troops at the fort.⁴ The Fort Smith Dramatic Association, noted in 1880 and 1881, presented several plays.⁵ Another amateur group in Fort Smith during the early 1880's was called The Garrick Club and lasted for two productions.⁶

In Fayetteville the Histrionic Club was formed in 1869 and was still extant in 1870.⁷ Although it seems to have presented no plays, the Fayetteville Dramatic and Reading Club was organized in 1876.⁸ The Fayetteville Dramatic Company gave its first and last play in 1885.⁹ The White Wings, originally a social club, became an amateur dramatic club and presented some plays in 1887.¹⁰

Dardanelle also fostered several dramatic groups during this era. In 1877 the Dardanelle Dramatic Club was organized, but there is no report of any productions.¹¹ The following year the Western

⁴Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 28, 1868.

⁵Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, April 7 and 14, 1880; April 16, 1881.

⁶Ibid., May 3 and 17, October 25, and November 22, 1882.

⁷Fayetteville Democrat, December 11, 1869; December 24, 1870.

⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 26, 1876.

⁹Ibid., September 17 and 24, 1885.

¹⁰Ibid., April 19 and June 7, 1887.

¹¹Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, May 18, 1877.

Dramatic Association was formed,¹² and in 1880 the Dardanelle Thespian Club staged a play with some success.¹³

Across the river from Dardanelle at Russellville, were a few such groups. Even though the Russellville Democrat encouraged its formation in 1877,¹⁴ an amateur drama club was not organized until 1885.¹⁵ During that same year the Excelsior Club staged three presentations.¹⁶

Other towns of the region likely had amateur troupes, but little information exists on the scope of their activities. A Fayetteville paper mentions The Home Dramatic Company of Bentonville in 1883.¹⁷ These organized groups were important because they attempted the more serious plays among the regional amateurs.

Temperance Organizations

Often plays were produced by organizations whose major interest was either to raise money or to teach a lesson. The temperance societies, quite active during the last half of the century, evinced interest in both purposes.

¹²Ibid., January 4, 1878.

¹³Ibid., January 2 and 9, 1880.

¹⁴Russellville Democrat, October 18, 1877.

¹⁵Ibid., August 27, 1885.

¹⁶Ibid., August 27, November 5 and 26, and December 24, 1885.

¹⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, April 11, 1883.

The earliest such attempt to present plays was by The Harmony Council, Temperance Reform, which staged a benefit entertainment consisting of "Dramas, Tableaux, Recitations, songs, etc." in 1872.¹⁸ It produced another "amateur theatrical" consisting of a play and some musical performances in March, 1873.¹⁹ The last mention of this group was in 1875, when it produced Ten Nights in a Bar Room. The performance was proclaimed a complete success,²⁰ and one of the characters was described as "so true to nature as to thrill every one present with the awful danger and degradation of drunkenness."²¹

Other temperance organizations that presented plays were: The Band of Hope at Russellville in 1887-1888;²² The Good Templars Lodge in Dardanelle, 1881-1882;²³ and The Murphy Amateur Dramatic Club in Van Buren, 1879.²⁴ The funds that were raised were never as important as the opportunity for sermonizing. While these groups had a limited appeal, they offered another outlet for the theatrical bent of the amateurs.

¹⁸Van Buren Press, February 20, 1872.

¹⁹Ibid., April 1, 1873.

²⁰Fort Smith New Era, June 30, 1875.

²¹Ibid.

²²Russellville Democrat, November 9, 1887; April 5, 1888.

²³Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, October 21, 1881; March 24, 1882.

²⁴Van Buren Press, February 15, April 1, May 10, 1879.

Fund-raising Organizations

In addition to the amateur dramatic clubs and the temperance organizations, numerous other groups presented dramatic entertainments as a means of raising funds.

The editor of a Dardanelle newspaper encourages amateur performances in order to raise funds for various public improvements.

Now there are several churches in need of repair, the old graveyard should be suitably enclosed and the new cemetery should have some attention. Dardanelle needs some sort of a fire engine. A good substantial bridge should be constructed over the creek between town and the spring, so that at all stages of the water our people can enjoy this lovely drive. The band needs some assistance. But above all the Immigration Society needs present help, and it all needs public spirit and enterprise.²⁵

Such an outpouring of civic needs suggests that more than an amateur dramatic club should have been organized. The editor was a man of perception, for almost all of the needs which he cited were the beneficiaries of funds netted by some amateur production in the region during this time. The groups that worked to raise money for the school or the church were ordinarily organized to fill one need and seldom performed more than the one benefit show. They had no specific names and usually were referred to as the "young people" or "the young ladies and gentlemen of the town."

Churches. The needs of the churches frequently gave rise to amateur dramatic performances. Hardly any denomination escaped the aid

²⁵Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, May 18, 1877.

of the amateurs. In 1870 retirement of the debt at the Episcopal Church in Fort Smith was the occasion for staging Handy Andy and All That Glitters is Not Gold.²⁶ The Methodist Church of Fort Smith included some scenes from Shakespeare in one of its amateur presentations in 1873.²⁷ "The sacred drama" entitled The Ten Virgins was produced in Russellville for the benefit of the Baptist Church of that town. The most impressive scene was reportedly the one "representing the five foolish virgins."²⁸ In Van Buren the Presbyterian Church was given the proceeds of a production of "The Serio-Comic" drama entitled All That Glitters is Not Gold, a very popular play with church groups. It was presented on March 9 and 10, 1876, and grossed about ninety dollars for the church.²⁹

The examples cited are typical of the numerous efforts that were made by amateurs for the benefit of the various churches in the region.

Bands. Many benefit band concerts during the period included one or more plays as a part of the evening's entertainment. The band in Clarksville, for example, gave a concert that included the play Rough Diamond as part of the evening's presentation.³⁰ In Fayetteville the

²⁶Fort Smith New Era, December 30, 1870.

²⁷Fort Smith Herald, February 8, 1873.

²⁸Russellville Democrat, December 21, 1876.

²⁹Van Buren Press, March 14, 1876.

³⁰Clarksville Enterprise, October 3, 1874.

Cornet Band had a concert in 1878 which included "dramatic entertainment" in the form of the play, Our Nelly.³¹ The bands throughout the region used plays as a closing of the evening's program. They were never known to attempt much more than light comedies and farces.

Other Needs. Perhaps the most far reaching objective for an amateur performance occurred when the German Aid Society gave a program of tableaux and musical numbers in 1871 for "the sufferers in France."³² Frequent plays were staged by various "Memorial Associations," such as the one in Fayetteville which did Enoch Arden in 1877, and raised \$117 for the treasury.³³ There were even the inevitable firemen's benefits at times, such as the one in Fayetteville in 1888. The program ended with a dramatic presentation entitled Lend Me 5 Shillings. The proceeds went to the Washington Hook and Ladder Company Number 1.³⁴

Other Organizations

Additionally other miscellaneous organizations existed, such as the Fort Smith Schuetzen Verein and the Literary Societies.

Fort Smith Schuetzen Verein. In Fort Smith a substantial settlement of German people was interested in theatrical activity. The major organization they developed was the Fort Smith Schuetzen Verein.

³¹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, March 20, 1878.

³²Fort Smith New Era, March 10, 1871.

³³Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, June 7, 1877.

³⁴Ibid., April 3, 1888.

This was basically a recreational and social club which held shooting matches on the edge of town and promoted balls and other entertainments. The theatrical efforts were incidental to the other activities, but nonetheless a part of their amusements. In 1875 the group presented Rough Diamond and followed it with Einer Muss Heirathen (One Must Marry), given in German. Both of the plays were reportedly successful. The editor of the Fort Smith Herald states that while he could not understand the language of the second play, "judging from the great applause of the German speaking members of the audience, it was a great success, and merited and received the approbation of all who could understand and appreciate the telling points of the piece."³⁵ The two plays were followed by a dance at which all enjoyed themselves "hugely."³⁶ The group met frequently, and plays were often a part of the entertainments.

Literary Societies. In Fayetteville the Arkansas Industrial University was the scene of some amateur dramatic performances through the activity of two literary clubs, the Clariosophic and the Mathetian Literary Societies. As early as 1874 the Clariosophic Society presented "an operatic charade entitled 'High Life.'"³⁷ During the years following this initial effort, the society intermittently staged dramatic performances at the University. The other society, the Mathetian,

³⁵Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 13, 1875.

³⁶Fort Smith New Era, March 31, 1875.

³⁷Fayetteville Democrat, April 25, 1874.

presented its first reported production in November, 1876.³⁸ Like the Clariosophic Society, the Mathetian gave occasional plays during the years following the first effort. The Mathetian's last public appearance before 1890 was in 1889, when Lady Audley's Secret was presented.³⁹ The production was so successful in Fayetteville that the group took to the road and toured Fort Smith, Rogers, and Bentonville before returning for a final performance in Wood's Opera House in Fayetteville.⁴⁰

The variety of clubs and organizations that presented dramatic entertainment was not exceptional for the time, but only indicative of the great appeal which amateur theatricals had for the people of the region.

II. THE TYPES OF PERFORMANCES

The types of amateur performances were varied. There were productions which were only dramatic in nature, and there were numerous musical entertainments which had no dramatic production associated with them. Frequently, however, the "concerts" included a play or some other theatrical presentation.

Plays

A variety of plays were selected by the amateurs for presentation, and although comedies were the usual fare, serious "dramas" were

³⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 23, 1876.

³⁹Ibid., December 10, 1889.

⁴⁰Ibid., December 17, 1889.

presented with some frequency. The one act play was the most popular length, but several full length productions were given.

Comedy. Following the tradition of this period, the longer plays were often followed by an afterpiece, usually a comedy. The short comedies and farces were not only used as afterpieces, but also as the one lone dramatic entertainment during a concert or musical presentation. The short plays included Rough Diamond, The Lottery Ticket, Paddy Mile's Boy, Box and Co., A Husband to Order, Irish Assurance and Yankee Modesty, The Happy Couple, The Persecuted Dutchman, and other such comic pieces.

A typical example of the type of comic plot preferred by the amateurs is found in A Pretty Piece of Business, a play presented several times in the region by the amateurs. The plot concerned mistaken identity. One review summarizes the plot:

Two gentlemen have been mistaken by two ladies and vice versa. The consequence is they all get slightly mixed in their courting arrangements, and the consequences are anything but pleasurable. But "all's well that ends well."⁴¹

Drama. Some plays were of a more serious nature, and represented a greater effort on the part of the amateurs. A group of Presbyterian young people in Van Buren presented All That Glitters is Not Gold, which was called both a "serio-comic drama" and a "standard drama."⁴² It is described as "one of the best plays that has ever been

⁴¹Van Buren Press, July 14, 1874.

⁴²Van Buren Argus, March 2, 1876.

brought before our citizens," and the editor encourages the production of such "high toned and interesting dramas."⁴³ The play was so successful that it was repeated two more times. Even for a play of "high tone," three performances in Van Buren were too many. The editor of the Van Buren Press wrote: "It surely would have been wiser to have produced an entirely new play than this one, which had been played twice before."⁴⁴

While none of the amateur groups ever attempted a full scale production of Shakespeare, some efforts were made at more serious drama. David Garrick was done twice in Fort Smith in 1882.⁴⁵ The Home Dramatic Company of Fort Smith successfully staged the Lady of Lyons in 1883,⁴⁶ and the Ladies Memorial Association of Fayetteville was also successful with Enoch Arden in 1877.⁴⁷ The Clariosophic Society at Arkansas Industrial University at Fayetteville presented Rip Van Winkle in 1874.⁴⁸

Amateurs in Fort Smith produced Cloy's Prophecy, an original "Tragedy" based on the life of Edgar Allan Poe, in Fort Smith and Van Buren in 1876.⁴⁹ The play was written by Mr. S. B. Corrington of Fort

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Van Buren Press, March 28, 1876.

⁴⁵Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, May 3 and 17, 1882.

⁴⁶Program for Lady of Lyons, dated June 5, 1883; the program is located at the Old Fort Museum, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

⁴⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, March 24, 1877.

⁴⁸Fayetteville Democrat, October 17, 1874.

⁴⁹Fort Smith New Era, April 12, 1876; Van Buren Argus, March 23, 1876.

Smith, who secured a copyright on a three act tragedy entitled Edgar A. Poe in 1876.⁵⁰ This was the first play to earn a copyright for an Arkansian.⁵¹

When the play was first given in Fort Smith and Van Buren under the title of Cloy's Prophecy, the author played the role of Edgar Allan. The plot of the play progressed "from Poe's early life to his melancholy end."⁵² The ending was "en grand tableau" described as "a weird scene" which held the audience spellbound for some moments after the curtain fell.⁵³ One writer states that the author "should have given the full name of Edgar A. Poe and John Howard Payne,"⁵⁴ for the full names of those two men were so suggestive of sadness and sorrow that "there is an irresistible charm in hearing them pronounced."⁵⁵ Cloy's Prophecy was the only original full length play attempted by the amateurs during this period.

Tableaux, The earliest form of theatrical entertainment that developed following the war was the tableau. Tableaux were living pictures, generally symbolic or didactic. A tableau was a frequent part of the drama during the nineteenth century. It was little more than a "posed picture full of dramatic interest, used at the end of a scene,

⁵⁰Paul T. Nolan and Amos E. Simpson, "Arkansas Drama Before World War I: An Unexplored Country," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XXII (Spring, 1963), 69.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Van Buren Argus, March 16, 1876.

⁵³Fort Smith New Era, April 12, 1876.

⁵⁴Van Buren Argus, March 16, 1876. ⁵⁵Ibid.

act, or play when something extremely dramatic had taken place."⁵⁶

Pantomime was not unusual in some of the tableaux, but usually no words were spoken.⁵⁷

One typical evening of tableaux occurred in Van Buren in December of 1867.⁵⁸ The first part of the program was seven tableaux: The Sciences, The Pantheon, The Seasons, The Graces, Domestic Felicity, Jupiter and His Court, and A Nun Taking the Veil. A description of "The Sciences" states:

In this picture Astronomy, History, and Commerce were represented as receiving instruction from Geography. The piece was encored again and again; in its repetition Geography directs her sister sciences to the great Infinite, who alone can reveal all truth. The first part was beautiful and instructive; the second was solemnly impressive.⁵⁹

For this same presentation the costumes were quite elaborate. This was part of the spectacle, which constituted one of the major appeals of this type of entertainment. Describing the costumes for the tableau of "The Seasons," the editor comments: "'The Seasons' was much admired--Spring, decorated with buds and peeping flowers; Summer, with ripened blooms of every hue; Fall with fruits and fading leaves; Winter, with snow, icicles and frosted brambles."⁶⁰

⁵⁶Garrett H. Leverton, The Production of Later Nineteenth Century American Drama: A Basis for Teaching (Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education, No. 677. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University), p. 95.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Van Buren Press, January 3, 1868.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

One reason tableaux appeared frequently was that they required few rehearsals. The program could be staged with much less effort than a play of comparable length. Highly popular with various fund raising groups during the first ten years following the war, tableaux were seldom used by the more serious groups after this period. The school exercises, however, frequently included such performances. A school closing at Russellville had two intriguing tableaux: "A midnight scene in a barroom" and "The Poets of Russellville."⁶¹ In 1868 the following five tableaux were sandwiched in between two plays at Van Buren: Execution of Joan of Arc; Repentance, Resignation, and Faith; Fortune Telling; The Lovers, Spring, Devotion, Reaper, Lurline; and The Last Dream.⁶² The variety of topics seems to have been endless.

In 1868 the soldiers at Fort Smith presented two evenings of tableaux and dramatic performances.⁶³ A description states that one of the great successes of the evening was a series of tableaux from Shakespeare. These included "The Entreaty from Corilanus" and "Desdimonia's [sic] declaration of innocence to Othello."⁶⁴

Following the initial popularity of tableaux during the early post war years, they became increasingly rare. The final tableau performance, except for a few in annual school exhibitions, was given in

⁶¹Russellville Democrat, June 24, 1875.

⁶²Van Buren Press, December 15, 1868.

⁶³Fort Smith Weekly Herald, November 30, 1867.

⁶⁴Ibid., December 14, 1867.

Russellville by the Excelsior Club in 1885.⁶⁵ This was the only such entertainment recorded during the 1880's and the last on record before 1890.

Temperance plays. In many instances the plays by the amateur groups were intended to influence the wayward and make believers out of the intemperate. Neither the plays nor the performers attempted to present any objective evaluations of the problems they dramatized. One organization was called The Band of Hope and produced three such plays on the same evening in 1888:⁶⁶ A Nominal Price, Three Glasses A Day--or A Broken Home, and the concluding piece, Our Awful Want.⁶⁷ The titles alone seem sufficient motivation to drive the intemperate from the performances. The year before the same group had staged We're All Tee Totalers, "a temperance farce in one act."⁶⁸

The great favorite of the temperance plays was Ten Nights in a Bar Room. In Russellville it was presented during two different years. The first production was in December, 1885, by the Excelsior Club, and the show was declared a great success.⁶⁹ In 1886 it was repeated at least three times and pronounced an unqualified success.⁷⁰ Other

⁶⁵Russellville Democrat, August 27, 1885.

⁶⁶Ibid., April 5, 1888.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., November 9, 1887.

⁶⁹Ibid., December 24, 1885.

⁷⁰Ibid., September 8, 1886.

productions of the play occurred in Mulberry in 1881,⁷¹ Van Buren in 1875,⁷² and Fort Smith in 1875.⁷³ The Van Buren performance received praise for its scenery and during "the pathetic portions of the drama, many persons in the audience were in tears."⁷⁴ The Fort Smith showing was a success, and three of the actresses were said to have performed their parts in an exceptional manner, but it was Miss Southmayd as Mary Morgan, who "brought the tears to many an eye. . . ."⁷⁵

With a combination of fund raising and moral didacticism, the temperance play remained popular with the audiences throughout the region. No indication remains, however, of the effects of these plays. Their appeal was limited, and they cannot be considered the most typical type of play presented during this time.

Opera. At various times during the period attempts were made at staging operas. In 1872 a troupe called The Bourland Operatic Troupe, composed of amateurs from Van Buren, toured the towns down the river from Van Buren with great success.⁷⁶ No report was made of the content of the performance, so the nature of the program is unknown. The term "Operatic" was possibly used to give the troupe a more acceptable title.

⁷¹Fort Smith Daily Herald, November 30, 1881.

⁷²Van Buren Press, May 4, 1875.

⁷³Fort Smith New Era, June 30, 1875.

⁷⁴Van Buren Press, May 4, 1875.

⁷⁵Fort Smith New Era, loc. cit.

⁷⁶Van Buren Press, July 16, 1872.

The major figure behind the production of opera in the region was Professor D. W. C. Botefuhr, at one time a professor of music at Arkansas Industrial University at Fayetteville. In 1879 he staged the opera Martha with much success.⁷⁷ This event marked the first recorded amateur performance of an opera in the region. Botefuhr later moved to Fort Smith, where he produced Martha again for the opening of the new Academy of Music building in 1883.⁷⁸ The full chorus consisted of forty-four voices and the production was acclaimed as excellent.⁷⁹

Other amateur opera activity included a scheduled performance of the opera Penelope by the Quintette Opera Club of Little Rock at the Academy of Music in 1884.⁸⁰ Additionally, operettas were staged by children's groups at various times during the period. The last amateur opera on record took place in Dardanelle and Russellville in 1885, when the Dardanelle Amateur Opera Company performed the opera Katie Dean for the town audience and then proposed carrying it to Russellville.⁸¹

III. ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION USED BY THE AMATEURS

Very little information remains concerning the extent of scenery, costumes and lighting used by the amateurs. The few remaining

⁷⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 12, 1879.

⁷⁸Fort Smith Weekly Elevator, September 28, 1883.

⁷⁹Ibid., October 5, 1883.

⁸⁰Daily Fort Smith Tribune, July 2, 1884.

⁸¹Russellville Democrat, January 8, 1885.

descriptions are extant because some part of the production was out of the ordinary. The typical probably was not newsworthy and escaped mention by the reporters.

Scenery

Although little is said of it, the amateurs probably used the scenery they found in the public halls where they played. One review of a production of Ten Nights in a Bar Room states: "The stage was very nicely arranged, and displayed three very nicely prepared scenes."⁸² When a group in Fort Smith staged the Last Loaf and The Persecuted Dutchman, one paper contains an observation about the scenery. "Both plays were put on stage in good style, the scenery and surroundings appropriate. . . ."⁸³ The extent of the amateurs' efforts is not indicated, but doubtless some scenery work was involved in the presentations.

Costumes

The costumes often attracted the eye of the reporter. In some instances comment on the costumes was used in advance publicity. One play was reportedly much improved by the "rich and varied costumes" which added "greatly to the effect and beauty of the tableau closing each scene."⁸⁴ When the Lady of Lyons was staged by the Home Dramatic Company of Fort Smith the costumes "of the time and place in which the

⁸²Van Buren Press, April 27, 1875.

⁸³Fort Smith Weekly Herald, April 22, 1876.

⁸⁴Ibid.

scene is laid" were ordered from St. Louis.⁸⁵ The effort which the amateurs expended upon costumes resulted in no adverse criticism about this element of production.

Lighting

The plays were first illuminated by oil lamps and later by gas lights. In 1884 gas fixtures were placed in the Academy of Music in Fort Smith, marking the first such installation in a theatre in the region.⁸⁶ One lone mention occurs concerning the lighting of a specific dramatic entertainment. In Fort Smith in 1881, a performance of A Pretty Piece of Business concluded with "a beautiful tableau" entitled "Shower of Pearls." This tableau was by the city's "loveliest little boys and girls," and was lighted by "a strong calcium light."⁸⁷ The lights' changing colors in this production made the tableau "very effective."⁸⁸

Due to the limited contact which the amateurs had with professional technical devices, both the amateurs and their audiences were probably unconcerned about absence of elaborate staging techniques.

IV. THE RECEPTION GIVEN THE AMATEURS

The majority of newspaper reports of the amateur performances

⁸⁵Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, May 30, 1883.

⁸⁶Daily Fort Smith Tribune, September 14, 1884.

⁸⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, April 27, 1881.

⁸⁸Fort Smith New Era, April 27, 1881.

were full of high praise. While individual actors were often singled out for commendation, the typical review focused on the group.

We have not room to dwell upon the merits of the different actors, but content ourselves with saying that each fully sustained the part assigned to him, and all who witnessed the performance speak in high terms of both the plays and the manner in which they were rendered.⁸⁹

The reviewers seemingly made few attempts at critical objectivity. When the "serious drama" entitled Miriam's Crime was presented by the Good Templars of Dardanelle, one review states:

We have home talent superior to many of the traveling shows coming here and why not patronize home entertainments, draw out home talent and keep our money at home and put it to proper use.⁹⁰

The praise was not always unqualified, however, for in some instances the newspapermen noted the faults and limitations of the actors. In 1875 a performance of Ten Nights in a Bar Room at Van Buren elicited much praise. One of the actors, however, was "a little too studied, for the part, but generally 'did' the character well," and two of the actresses were "hardly loud enough."⁹¹

V. SUMMARY

The amateur entertainments in northwest Arkansas from 1865 to 1890 were a necessary part of the social and recreational activity of the citizens of the region. Fayetteville was the town which saw the most

⁸⁹Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, November 22, 1882.

⁹⁰Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, January 20, 1882.

⁹¹Van Buren Press, April 27, 1875.

amateur productions. The presence of the Arkansas Industrial University and the Literary Societies, which presented dramatic entertainments with some regularity, placed the town in the forefront of amateur activity. The amateurs from Fort Smith were the second most ambitious and presented over thirty productions during the twenty-five year period. Van Buren was not far behind with almost twenty-five productions, and both Dardanelle and Russellville saw almost fifteen amateur productions.

Bentonville, Clarksville, and Alma all had amateur activity during this time, and probably many amateur efforts were made that were not reported in the newspapers.

Periodically a lull in dramatic entertainment would prompt the newspaper editors to urge the organization of an amateur group. Some of the clubs that were formed seemingly never produced any plays. Sometimes the coming of a professional company would provide a temporary impetus for the amateurs, but this usually faded soon.

The most active period for the amateurs throughout the area was during the decade of the 1870's. During the 1880's the increase in the visits of professional companies paralleled the decrease in amateur efforts. Fayetteville was the only town in the region to record an amateur production in 1889.

The work of the amateurs was generally quite successful. No indication is given that they ever offended an audience, or presented a performance which was not worth the price of admission. They were rarely criticized by the press, and the praise which was given them was usually unqualified. The contribution that the amateur efforts made to the often

sparse calendar of dramatic entertainments, as well as the recreational value afforded the participants, made them invaluable to the life of the communities in northwest Arkansas during this period.

CHAPTER XI

AMUSEMENTS AND ENTERTAINMENTS: 1865-1889

Following the Civil War the forms of amusements in northwest Arkansas became more varied. While only rare performances of magicians, lecturers, musical variety shows, panoramas and other entertainments had occurred before the war, the twenty-five year period between 1865 and 1889 saw a significant increase in the number of such events. The purpose of this chapter is to present information of the various types of amusements and entertainments which came into the region to perform for the citizens during this time.¹ The entertainments will be divided into five main groups: musical and variety entertainments; magicians, ventriloquists, and spiritual mediums; lecturers, elocutionists, and readers; medicine shows; and miscellaneous presentations such as panoramas, Indian dancers, and street shows.

I. MUSICAL AND VARIETY ENTERTAINMENTS

Three main forms of musical and variety entertainment came to the region during this time. The first was the traveling "variety troupe," which presented a varied program of skits, musical numbers, and dances. The next was the individual professional musician, who

¹"Appendix C" contains a list of the amusements and entertainments which were reported by the regional newspapers during this period.

traveled into the region in order to perform for the citizens. The third was the "variety theatre," two of which were organized in Fort Smith in the 1880's.

Traveling Variety Troupes

One of the most popular types of traveling shows was the "variety troupe." They had various names such as "Comedy Companies," "Bell Ringers," or often just "Varieties." The content of their programs was usually quite similar. In 1867 when the Welch and Orr's Varieties played in Fort Smith, their program is reported to have contained some "Dramas and Farces," but the greater part of their time was spent on "Songs, Dances, Duett's, Quartetts, Glee's, Trios, and Comicalities."²

A lengthy review of the Blaisdell Brothers and the McAvoy's Swiss Bell Ringers in 1878 indicates that the variety presentation had changed little in this eleven-year period.

The Blaisdell Brothers and the McAvoy's, arrived on the steamer Maumelle yesterday and gave their first performance at Adelaide Hall last night. The laughable sketch "Our New Servant" with Fred McAvoy as "Sir Edward," and "Handy Andy," with Mrs. McAvoy as Lady Edward began the programme. Miss Julia Blaisdell is an excellent performer on the harp. She played a Hornpipe and Yankee Doodle, two distinct airs, at the same time. She was loudly encored. Master Willie Blaisdell is a good singer and dancer, and likewise performs his part in the bell ringing. His makeup in the "Happy Old Man" was good.

Several popular airs were performed on the bells, by the Blaisdells, and were well received. Mr. McAvoy was unable to sing as he had a bad cold. The McAvoy's are good actors, and with Willie Blaisdell in the farce "Fresh from the Farm," kept the

²Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, April 13, 1867.

audience in a roar of laughter. Sterben entertained the audience with the "Carnival of Venice," and other airs on the violin. The performance concluded with the farce entitled "Here she goes and there she goes."³

Eleven years following this, the "Variety" companies still remained much the same. In 1889 the Royce and Lansing Musical Comedy Company played in Russellville, and a review of the performance gives evidence of the similarity.

A good-sized audience witnessed the performance of the Royce and Lansing Comedy Company last Thursday night, at Luker and Davis' Hall. The entertainment consisted of musical specialties, comedy and character impersonations, songs, etc., the whole forming a programme of absorbing interest and full of enjoyment. The Company made a favorable impression here and should they return again will receive a most hearty welcome.⁴

The shows were not unlike vaudeville, but instead of independent acts, all of the entertainers traveled in a company and each one usually had more than one specialty. When the New Orleans and New York Olio Comedy Troupe performed in the region in 1878, one of the members, Master Eddie Laiscell, was noted for his acrobatic feats, while another member of the troupe, Mr. Charles Laiscell, was commended for his execution of the "lightning Zouave drill."⁵ In Fort Smith, Charles Laiscell also was praised for "Exposures of the so-called mediums, and spiritualistic seances [sic]."⁶

The Sims Family was in Dardanelle in 1883 with an almost

³Fort Smith Daily Herald, January 29, 1878.

⁴Russellville Democrat, January 10, 1889.

⁵Fayetteville Democrat, February 2, 1878.

⁶Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 28, 1878.

entirely musical program. The Dardanelle Post reports: "The programme consisted of Songs and Guitar Solos. But the feature of the company is Little Flora, whose dancing wins for her rapturous applause every time she appears on the stage."⁷

Another so-called family company, the famous Peak Family Swiss Bell Ringers, appeared at Fort Smith in January, 1876. This troupe was well-known nationally and was advertised as "the old original troupe of Bell Ringers who first produced bell ringing in the United States in 1839."⁸ The one report given the company by the press states that it "gave satisfaction, and Mr. Burton Stanley, in all of his parts was up to the standard."⁹

Among other companies featuring bell-ringing, Smith's Bell Ringers made such a popular hit during a first appearance in 1869 that it returned in 1872 for a second series of performances. The company's visit to Fayetteville in December, 1869, was the first reported company of "Bell Ringers" in the area.¹⁰ Smith's Bell Ringers went from Fayetteville to Fort Smith and received a good hearing in that growing city.¹¹ In 1872 they returned to both of these towns and were again accorded a pleasant reception.¹²

⁷Dardanelle Post, November 29, 1883.

⁸Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 15, 1876.

⁹Ibid., January 28, 1876.

¹⁰Fayetteville Democrat, December 25, 1869.

¹¹Fort Smith New Era, December 29, 1869.

¹²Fayetteville Democrat, January 13, 1872; Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 20, 1872.

Not all of the musical and variety troupes were of this same type. A company styled Lilly Clay's Colossal Gaity Company appeared in Fort Smith at the Grand Opera House in 1889. Some of the publicity for the company billed it as Lilly Clay's Shapely Blondes.¹³ For this performance the Elevator reported that George Tilles, the manager of the Opera House, was in a quandary. The demand for front seats far exceeded the supply. "The three front rows will comfortably seat about one hundred, and there are 532 applications for them."¹⁴ Lilly Clay had been in the city the year before, and the content of her program on that trip included a female minstrel group as well as a "Burlesque extravaganza" entitled "Robinson Crusoe, or the Princess, The Dude and the Missing Link," a nursery legend done up in burlesque rhymes. Another part of the program included a "Soiree Musicale" entitled "Beauty in Dreamland." The description in the program states:

"Beauty in Dreamland" in which is successfully introduced the latest local triumphs of the day, novel, joy inspiring flashes of merriment, incased in a frame of feminine loveliness. . . .¹⁵

Generally the musical and variety troupes met with friendly receptions in the region. The content of their programs was basically the same and offered light entertainment which was more amusing than instructive.

¹³Fort Smith Elevator, September 20, 1889.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Program dated November 23, 1888 (Fort Smith Collection, Carnegie Library, Fort Smith, Arkansas).

Musical Performers

In addition to the combination musical and variety entertainments, some individual musical performers came to the region during this time. One of the first seen by Fort Smith audiences was Madame Louise Payne Wray and her daughter, Ada Wray. In June, 1867, Madame Wray announced that she would sing "Cavatinas, Bravinas, Ballads from the first masters."¹⁶

In 1873 Professor John Kelly, a violinist, gave "one of his chaste and elegant parlor entertainments" for a "large, select, and appreciative audience" at Adelaide Hall. He was reported to have "fully sustained his well-earned and well-established reputation as one of the leading violinists of the day."¹⁷ The first concert was so successful that he followed it with another the following week.¹⁸

Another such performer who visited the region was the nationally famous Negro pianist, Blind Tom, who entertained audiences throughout the country during that period. Blind Tom appeared in the region twice, once in 1880, and again in 1882. When he was in Fort Smith in 1880, he was greeted by a large audience which seemed amazed at his ability.¹⁹ One editor writes: "Blind Tom created much excitement among our people. This is an instance where the colored man

¹⁶Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, June 8, 1867.

¹⁷Fort Smith Weekly Herald, July 5, 1873.

¹⁸Ibid., July 12, 1873.

¹⁹Fort Smith Elevator, March 26, 1880.

stands ahead of the white man, away ahead at that."²⁰ When he returned in 1882 he played in Ozark as well as Fort Smith.²¹ While in Fort Smith he gave three concerts to crowded houses each time.²²

Blind Amos was another such "prodigy" who appeared in Fort Smith in 1889, and one paper reports:

If you want to hear a full string band, with but one performer, you should not fail to drop in and see Blind Amos in the Bollinger building near the city hotel. He plays first and second violin, double bass and B Flat cornet all at the same time and makes excellent music. To do this requires that his mind guides eight different parts of the body. His second violin is manipulated with his right foot and knee, double bass with left foot and knee, the B Flat with the head of his first violin, the mouthpiece being held to his lips by means of wires. The instruments are fixed up by means of an ingenious invention of his own, made by himself, notwithstanding he has been totally blind since he was four years of age. A description of the invention cannot be given, but it costs only ten cents to drop in and see him during the day or in the evening, and it is worth double the amount. We say this much for Amos complimentary and free of charge.²³

This was perhaps the most unusual individual musical entertainer who visited the region during this time. Doubtless many other such single performers came, but because of their limited appeal, the press gave them little coverage.

Variety theatres

There were two "Variety Theatres" which existed during the

²⁰Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, March 24, 1880.

²¹Russellville Democrat, March 23, 1882.

²²Fort Smith Elevator, March 31, 1882.

²³Ibid., February 11, 1889.

1880's in Fort Smith. The first one, The Bell Point Varieties, opened in June, 1883, and was managed by John Wolf.²⁴ The location of the "theatre" was in an old stone building near the corner of Garrison Avenue and Ozark Street.²⁵ A statement concerning the opening appears in one of the papers.

We understand the programme was particularly interesting. Music, dancing, and all the features incident to such entertainments were presented in a manner that gives promise of success to the institution, and lots of fun for the "boys." The Belle Point Varieties will remain open for the balance of the season, and the manager will spare no pains to make it a center of attraction to all who enjoy sport.²⁶

No record shows how long this "theatre" existed, and no indication is given that it ever attracted any adverse criticism.

The second Variety Theatre, The Gem Theatre, was opened in 1888 by Mr. F. T. Cochrane. Its location was a large room behind Frank Barlings' saloon, remodeled to seat about four hundred people and reportedly having fourteen boxes. The Fort Smith Elevator reports:

Mr. Cochrane promises that his theatre shall be conducted in first-class style, and he will spare neither pains nor expense in securing for it the best talent in that line. The performances will be strictly legitimate, and nothing of any immoral character will be permitted in connection with them. Saturday afternoons will be devoted to matinees for ladies and children, and on these occasions the saloon in front will be closed.²⁷

The admission to this "first-class establishment" was twenty-five,

²⁴Fort Smith Independent True Democrat, June 20, 1883.

²⁵Fort Smith New Era, June 21, 1883.

²⁶Fort Smith Independent True Democrat, June 20, 1883.

²⁷Fort Smith Elevator, May 11, 1888.

thirty-five, and fifty cents.²⁸ The Gem Theatre continued to run throughout 1888, and the last mention in the papers was in 1889, when a prominent doctor, Dr. E. Poe Harris, of the Choctaw Nation, was robbed of sixteen hundred dollars by the actresses of the Gem Theatre. There was no conviction because the "actress," who was finally charged with the theft, left town and was not heard of again.²⁹

II. MAGICIANS, VENTRILOQUISTS, AND SPIRITUAL MEDIUMS

Another form of popular amusement during this period was the performances of traveling magicians, ventriloquists and spiritual mediums. Often a presentation would include all three types of entertainment. The shows varied from "company" size to individuals, and from elaborate stage shows to street performances.

Magicians

Following the Civil War, the earliest reported magician in northwest Arkansas was Professor Delay, the Wizard of the West, who announced a performance for Fayetteville in September, 1868.³⁰ A year later Fayetteville witnessed the A. T. Shattuck and Company Great Western Varieties, an entertainment which consisted of "slight of hand tricks" as well as "fun, mirth, music, and ventriloquism."³¹ The show

²⁸Ibid., May 25, 1888.

²⁹Ibid., November 29 and December 6, 1889.

³⁰Fayetteville Democrat, September 19, 1868.

³¹Ibid., November 27, 1869.

was duly appreciated by a "large and intelligent audience."³² These early performances marked the beginning of many visiting magicians, who came into the region during the next two decades.

The common title for magicians at this time seemed to be "Professor." While this had no actual meaning, it was part of the showmanship employed by such performers. It evidently was used to give prospective audiences the impression that the performances had some educative value and the so-called "professor" was a man of exceptional abilities.

The audiences at Fort Smith witnessed several different public displays of magic during this time. In 1872 Professor Sands, "the renowned magician," played to large audiences at Adelaide Hall.³³ Professor E. C. Taylor, a "Prestidigitator and Illusionist," entertained audiences in August, 1874.³⁴ His program included suspending a girl on stage "with no visible means of support," and the "instantaneous growth of flowers." His performance was described as "rare, chaste, and unapproachable," and he was recommended to other audiences in the region.³⁵ That same year Professor Gershom, the Wizard, announced "one of his interesting and surprising entertainments" to be given at Adelaide Hall.³⁶

³²Ibid., December 4, 1869.

³³Fort Smith Weekly Herald, March 9, 1872.

³⁴Ibid., August 22, 1874.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., November 28, 1874.

In 1875 Frederick, "the great Danish Ventriloquist and Illusionist and Necromancer," appeared at Dardanelle. His program there was said to be "very good" and included the rapid escape of a girl from an iron cage, pronounced as incredible.³⁷ In January, 1876, Frederick was in Fort Smith, and his admirable performance was witnessed by a full house.³⁸

Not all of the traveling magicians were well accepted. At Fayetteville a Professor Landlis, "magician, ventriloquist, and scientific lecturer," appeared at Van Winkle Hall in July, 1883. The audience grew tired and some of the boys in the audience mobbed him and threw eggs at him. The Professor was arrested, fined eleven dollars for showing without a license, and because he would not pay the fine, landed in jail.³⁹ The paper reproved the boys and reflected that it was no wonder the town had a name for bad conduct and lawlessness when boys would act in such a way.⁴⁰

"Spiritualistic" Shows

In addition to the straight magic show, other performances were also based on the supernatural. One example was the "spiritualistic" show. At least three of these appeared in the region during the 1880's. In Van Buren the Miller Brothers presented a "spiritual medium"

³⁷Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, January 7, 1867.

³⁸Fort Smith Weekly Herald, January 22, 1876.

³⁹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, July 25, 1883.

⁴⁰Ibid., August 1, 1883.

entertainment, but it was reported as totally unsuccessful and pronounced a "humbug." The editor of the Van Buren Press writes:

The bigger the humbug the larger the number of dupes, as a general rule, that are present. We were one of the "hacks" that sat through it all and if there was one really satisfactory spiritualistic test presented, we did not discern it.⁴¹

The attempt on the part of the Millers to avoid the city tax reportedly led to a scene when the sheriff and city marshal came to collect the licenses. This "brought tears and sorrow-burdened sobs from eye and aching breast alike of the 'materialized Millers' before they hurried away."⁴²

In 1886 the Hume Spiritualistic Show appeared in Fort Smith at the Academy of Music and failed to satisfy the large audience.⁴³ As members of the show were boarding the Frisco train to leave, they were arrested "on a charge of Sabbath breaking," but the charge did not stick and they left for Van Buren later that day on foot.⁴⁴

The Steens, another "spiritualistic" show, toured the region in 1888. When it was in Russellville, the Democrat reviewed the performance.

The artists are adept in the science of slight-of-hand and performed some marvelous feats in this line. Their mind-reading, though mystifying, was accomplished by some unknown method of communication between the gentleman and lady, and lacked everything

⁴¹Van Buren Press, April 8, 1882.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Fort Smith Elevator, February 12, 1886.

⁴⁴Ibid.

of being supernatural, as the failure to execute certain tests presented to them abundantly proved.

However, their work in this specialty was good, perhaps their best work was in exposing spiritualism. This they did in a most convincing manner showing the utmost familiarity with the subject. In this exposure the Christian world will wish Mr. and Mrs. Steen God-Speed.⁴⁵

Ventriloquists

Other aspects of the magic performances are seldom reported. Ventriloquism is usually mentioned among the skills of the magicians, but little actual information exists about acts employing this skill.

In Dardanelle in March, 1883, however, a ventriloquist came and used his craft to sell scissors. The following description indicates the manner in which he went about his business.

The ventriloquist mounts a little ladder and seats himself five or six feet above the ground where all can see. On each knee he places a puppet, one representing a little "nigger" and the other a little Irishman whose mouths or jaws can be manipulated and their head turned by the performer in a very striking manner. Under the control of this skillful ventriloquist the puppets seem to talk very naturally and one instance which occurred Saturday evening was particularly funny: An old negro who had just come up and who was filled with wonder at the marvelous performance, approached quite close to see what kind of folks "dey wuz." As he began to scrutinize them the little "nigger" turned his head down toward the old fellow and said "Howdy Grandpa" to which the old fellow replied "I'se no grandpa ter you--you little brat." "Yes you is, yes you is, and now you's trying to deny it," said the puppet, and the discussion waxed hot and hotter til the old man grabbed a stick declaring that no impudent brat could "talk ter him like dat."⁴⁶

The reception accorded the magicians, illusionists, spiritualists, necromancers, prestidigitators, and ventriloquists was varied.

⁴⁵Russellville Democrat, April 19, 1888.

⁴⁶Dardanelle Post, March 8, 1883.

Some of the shows were welcomed, and others were the subject of ridicule, criticism, and in one case, even violence. The individual magicians were more popular in the years before 1880, and the more complex shows appeared more frequently after the 1880's. These amusements offered the audiences of the region still one more form of entertainment for their leisure.

III. LECTURERS, ELOCUTIONISTS AND READERS

The audiences of northwest Arkansas had opportunities to hear a wide variety of traveling lecturers and elocutionists during this time. The difference between the elocutionist and the lecturer was clear. The lecturer presented an informative or inspirational talk on subjects ranging from "The Mormons" to "World Travel." On the other hand, the elocutionists would offer a program of "dramatic readings and recitations" from Shakespeare, Browning, Dickens, and other well-known writers.

The Lecturers

The first indication of a lecturer in the region following the Civil War occurred in Fort Smith in 1866. The Tri-Weekly Herald of January 11, 1866, contained an article on Artemus Ward, which seemed to suggest that he was in town.⁴⁷ No definite reference was made to Fort Smith in the article, and there is a possibility that it was taken from a newspaper from another town. Artemus Ward was well-known and lectured

⁴⁷Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, January 11, 1866.

in many of the western towns during this period, so such an appearance in Fort Smith is not unlikely.

In 1878 Rev. James L. Denton spoke in Fort Smith. His varied subjects included "Nature and Curiosities of Habit," and "A Grand Life."⁴⁸ His presentation is highly praised in the Daily Herald.

The Eminent lecturer evinced perfect mastery over his varied and truly interesting theme, and swayed his audience at will by the liveliest sallies of wit, the keenest thrusts of satire and the grandest flights of eloquence.⁴⁹

His entire performance is reported to have been characterized by profound depth of feeling and lofty elevation of thought.⁵⁰

Later that same year another lecturer, Dr. Trotter, spoke at Adelaide Hall in Fort Smith. The content of his lecture illustrates the diversity of subjects on which the lecturers were able to speak. "The Good Doctor's theme embraced a wide range of subjects, comprising immigration, agriculture, manufacture, science, phrenology, physiognomy, and other kindred sciences."⁵¹

In 1879 "a creole lady of rare culture and refinement" called Madame Louis, presented a lecture "on a subject of vital interest to any southern community, viz: 'The negro, his past, present and future.'"⁵² After hearing her, Valentine Dell, the editor of the New Era, wrote:

⁴⁸Fort Smith Daily Herald, February 23 and 27, 1878.

⁴⁹Ibid., February 27, 1878.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., March 24, 1878.

⁵²Fort Smith New Era, October 29, 1879.

". . . we scarcely ever enjoyed a greater intellectual treat and eloquent and beautiful oratory."⁵³

The humorist, Eli Perkins, came into the region in 1888 and presented lectures at Bentonville and Fayetteville.⁵⁴ In 1889 Mrs. Letitia Watkins, a lady lecturer "famous throughout the entire west as the greatest lady humorist now on the platform," was scheduled to perform in Fayetteville at Wood's Opera House. Her subject was to be "What I Know."

The newspapers reported fewer lecturers in the region during the 1880's than in the years before. The press, however, likely overlooked some as they became more commonplace.

Elocutionists and Readers

The elocutionists who appeared in the area during the period offered a variety of types of programs to the audiences of the region. The first such elocutionist was Professor A. Ryan with his twelve year old son, Rolla. The father-son team performed in Fort Smith in 1870 and the programs were well attended by "the elite" of the city.⁵⁵ Master Rolla, the son, was reported to be "a genius of the first order, and in his representation of different characters and rendition of various readings and recitations, we have never seen his equal."⁵⁶

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, April 10, 1888.

⁵⁵Fort Smith Weekly Herald, July 2, 1870.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Master Rolla and his father came back to Fort Smith in 1875.⁵⁷

A report of their performance states:

The Prof. sustained his former reputation, and Master Rolla surpassed himself. He was wonderfully improved since his appearance here five years ago. They gave another entertainment last night, to a crowded house, all of whom were perfectly carried away. The professor and Rolla, went almost beyond themselves in making the entertainment all that could have been anticipated, and in the characters they represent they cannot be surpassed.⁵⁸

In 1886 "Master" Rolla returned to the region with The Rolla Ryan Comedy Company. This company played in Fayetteville at the Court-house in October, 1886, where it promised "over two hours of genuine, unalloyed dyspepsia-banishing laughter. . . ." ⁵⁹ The performance was "largely attended and highly appreciated." The "character representations" which Rolla presented were said to be "hard to excell."⁶⁰

In 1877 Lillian Roselle Messenger, a poetess and dramatic reader, came to Fayetteville and Fort Smith.⁶¹ When she appeared in Fort Smith, she was assisted by Col. J. A. Lockhart from Van Buren. She read from Dickens, Browning, and Douglas Jerrold. A description of her states:

Mrs. M. was magnificently attired in elegant black silk and velvet and her entrance and exit were so natural and her movement so easy, so void of anything "stagey," that she at once captivated her audience and held it hers throughout the entire entertainment.⁶²

⁵⁷Ibid., November 13, 1875.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Fayetteville Democrat, October 15, 1886.

⁶⁰Ibid., October 22, 1886.

⁶¹Ibid., November 3, 1877; Fort Smith Daily Herald, January 3, 1878.

⁶²Fort Smith Daily Herald, January 3, 1878.

The audience was satisfied with her program, and the paper reports: "Those who heard her, want to hear her again, and those who failed to hear, insist that they too must have the pleasure."⁶³

Fay Hempstead, a poet from Little Rock, visited the area on two occasions as an "elocutionist and dramatic reader." In 1880 he appeared in Van Buren, Fort Smith, and Dardanelle with a program of dramatic readings. The Van Buren Press wrote: "As an elocutionist and author, Fay Hempstead has a state reputation, although he has never before ventured out from Little Rock on an occasion like this."⁶⁴ When he was in Fort Smith, he was praised for his program of "a variety of splendid readings and recitations from various authors. . . ."⁶⁵ The Dardanelle Independent Arkansian states that Hempstead "furnished his hearers with one of the most pleasing evening's entertainments they have ever enjoyed."⁶⁶

The following year he went to Fort Smith again, and he read from Dicken's works. While his two performances were "not as well attended as they deserved to be," he nonetheless pleased the audience with his presentation. On this trip the preparation of the speaker's platform was reportedly done by a "lady friend."

The absence of scenery and stage paraphernalia was gracefully supplied by bouquets of rare flowers placed there by the fair-hand of an appreciative lady friend, which act of kindness on

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Van Buren Press, August 21, 1880.

⁶⁵Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, August 25, 1880.

⁶⁶Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, August 27, 1880.

her part not only decorated the rostrum but will no doubt form a green spot in the memory of the talented elocutionist for whose benefit the compliment was bestowed.⁶⁷

The popularity of elocutionists varied with the individual performers, but on a whole they were successful in their entertainments.

IV. MEDICINE SHOWS

One form of amusement which visited the region in this period was the medicine show. The most popular single show of this type was The Wizard Oil Company. This company made two appearances in the region, one in 1879 and the other in 1884. The program which the Wizard Oil troupe presented was mostly musical and usually given in the open air by their gaily painted wagon. While the company was in Dardanelle in May and June, 1879, the editor of the Western Immigrant wrote:

During last week, from Wednesday until Saturday evening, the citizens of Dardanelle were entertained nightly by a series of open air concerts given by the Wizard Oil Troupe, in front of the post office. The crowds that gathered to listen to the music were simply immense, comprising at all times the most genteel and respectable elements of our city. The outfit was a piece of pageantry of the most massive and magnificent character. The chariot was hardly as large as a palace car, but not less splendid, while mammoth horses, four in number, iron gray stallions of the Norman breed, dappled like leopards, high-headed high-steppers; well, the whole combination taken all together was just about the biggest thing on wheels that we have seen in a long time. The singing was pronounced most excellent, but our people didn't go wild over the singers, neither were they taken to private houses that we know of, nor toasted, nor lionized, but when they left they carried with them many good wishes and probably considerable money, the latter article being "the object of the meeting."⁶⁸

⁶⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, May 4, 1881.

⁶⁸Dardanelle The Western Immigrant, June 5, 1879.

The company was composed of Dr. E. McConkey, Messrs. Frank Howard, William H. Hunt, and James Moran.⁶⁹ Hunt won his way into the hearts of the townspeople of Dardanelle by singing with the Methodist Church Choir while in town.⁷⁰

From Dardanelle the Wizard Oil Troupe went to Fort Smith. The press encouraged attendance, and the company stayed in Fort Smith for two weeks, performing each evening before large crowds.⁷¹

The troupe came back to the region in 1884 and performed in Dardanelle in early May.⁷² It then went to Fort Smith in June, where "they entertained large crowds of people every evening with their excellent instrumental and vocal music."⁷³

Other less significant "Medicine Shows" traveled through the region. In 1886 the Celebrated Davenport Brothers arrived in Van Buren from Ozark and announced that they would give their "choice open air free concerts" for ten days. Their particular medicine was Electric Oil, and the Van Buren Press says: "The success of the Electric Oil is wonderful, and at Ozark it just captured the town."⁷⁴

⁶⁹Ibid., May 29, 1879.

⁷⁰Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, June 30, 1879.

⁷¹Fort Smith New Era, June 4, 1879; Fort Smith Elevator, June 6, 1879.

⁷²Dardanelle Post, May 1, 1884.

⁷³Fort Smith Elevator, June 13, 1884.

⁷⁴Van Buren Press, February 20, 1886.

Two such performances were reported at Russellville during this time. In 1879 a young man came to town and gave a street exhibition of wire walking. Accompanying him was another man who sold "corn medicine." The Russellville Democrat observes: ". . . A good many of the rural people who listened to his syreen [sic] strains of elocution went home sadder and poorer, but we trust wiser men."⁷⁵ Ten years later Dr. Hunter's Concert Troupe drew large crowds nightly and was so successful that it decided to remain for another week.⁷⁶ Dr. Hunter was supposedly an M. D. with marvelous cures for all ailments.

While the real significance of this type of entertainment was minor, it nonetheless afforded one more form of amusement for the citizens to see.

V. MISCELLANEOUS PRESENTATIONS

Other theatrical entertainments were seen by the citizens of northwest Arkansas during this period. These amusements do not fit under any of the above categories but must be mentioned to give a complete picture of entertainments for this time.

Panoramas

In 1865 the first panorama following the Civil War was exhibited in Van Buren. The subject of the panorama was "War Scenes,"

⁷⁵Russellville Democrat, January 1, 1880.

⁷⁶Ibid., December 13, 1889.

and the owner was reported to be Captain Adams.⁷⁷ Later that year in the Episcopal Church in Fort Smith, Dr. Beale's Panorama was shown to crowded houses. The nature of the panorama was not disclosed.⁷⁸

The only other reported panorama in the region was in Fayetteville in 1887. The paper announced that "The great original cyclorama of Milton's Paradise Lost" would be presented at Wood's Opera House in September.⁷⁹ Accompanying this "sublime, magnificent and impressive exhibition" were "the original and only Miltonian Jubilees," who were to render each evening a "choice selection of sacred, sentimental, and old plantation melodies."⁸⁰

Indian Shows

As early as 1865 the proximity of Fort Smith to Indian Territory produced entertainment from the citizens of that nation. In September the New Era reports:

Last Monday about a dozen of the dusky warriors of the plains of the Osage Tribe, exhibited themselves in one of their "war dances" in the Garrison. The thing looked savage enough--perhaps a little ridiculous [sic] too. It was witnessed by a large crowd of people.⁸¹

In 1884 a band of Pawnee Indians was brought in for the county

⁷⁷Fort Smith New Era, April 29, 1865.

⁷⁸Ibid., September 9, 1865.

⁷⁹Fayetteville Democrat, September 23, 1887; Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 20, 1887.

⁸⁰Fayetteville Democrat, September 23, 1887.

⁸¹Fort Smith New Era, September 23, 1887.

fair in Fort Smith to stage a "fierce robbery" of a stage coach every afternoon. A description of the action is in the Fort Smith Daily Tribune:

Like yesterday's performance, this scene opened with a four-horse stage loaded with passengers, both ladies and gentlemen, driving along when a band of hideously painted Indians began the attack. The driver lashed his horses, the passengers returned the Indians' fire but the robbers pursued and a lively running fight followed. A rescuing party of cowboys put in appearance and the battle waged warm. Clear around the track the chase and fight continued and then the stage was taken, the passengers formed in a line outside, made to hold up their hands and were carefully searched by the sons of the forest in a manner that showed that they were familiar with the methods of doing such things. A child was seized and carried off by the Pawnees and immediately the cow-boys went in pursuit. Twice around the track a running fight was kept up, and one could almost imagine himself on the plains witnessing in reality what was so truly represented. The Indians, warmed up with their work seemed heartily to enjoy the excitement and with long hair flying, their pistols flourished and their horses at full speed, presented a spectacle not soon to be forgotten. The battle finally ended, the white man triumphed and made captives of the Pawnees, the track was cleared, the scene shifted and the horse races went on. . . ."⁸²

Before this band of Pawnees left for New Orleans (where they were to appear at the World's Exposition), it staged a series of Indian Dances at the Academy of Music. On the program was a "Pawnee war dance, scalp dance and medicine dance" in which the "dusky sons of the forest played their parts pretty well considering their want of stage training."⁸³

Other Entertainments

A Punch and Judy Puppet Show was presented on the streets of

⁸²Fort Smith Daily Tribune, October 19, 1884.

⁸³Ibid., October 21, 1884.

Fort Smith in February, 1879. It attracted a great "concourse of people at the Bank Corner" and "the ventriloquist who conducted the performance raked a rich harvest of nickles from the assembled crowd."⁸⁴ In the same line the Royal Marionettes made an appearance at Van Winkle Hall in Fayetteville in 1883. This entertainment was well received and the Arkansas Sentinel reports:

Everybody was well pleased with the show and could not but marvel at the perfection attained by the manipulators of those wax figures and the close resemblance of the figures to living realities. The comic effect was good and the closing scene beautiful.⁸⁵

The same troupe appeared the next week at Fort Smith.⁸⁶

Some of the traveling entertainments were educational. In 1881 the Sanders Stereopticon Show came to Russellville but failed to perform in any other town in the region.⁸⁷ Another educational show was presented by Professor W. T. Foster at Russellville in 1881. This show featured a demonstration of an "Electric light," as well as Edison's "speaking phonograph."⁸⁸

Russellville was also visited by Miss Mattie Lee Price,, "the Georgia Magnetic-electric girl." A description indicates that she might have been schooled in "judo."

⁸⁴Fort Smith New Era, February 19, 1879.

⁸⁵Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 24, 1883.

⁸⁶Fort Smith Elevator, October 17 and 26, 1883.

⁸⁷Russellville Democrat, February 3, 1881.

⁸⁸Ibid., March 24, 1881.

She is about 18 years old, weighs 108 pounds and displays wonderful power. There is a diversity of opinion in regard to the source of her power, whether it is a magnetism, electricity or muscular development. Whatever it is she manages to toss the biggest men in town around like they were children.⁸⁹

Other exhibitions were put on by individuals. Michael Johnson, billed as "The Champion Walker," charged fifty cents to see him as he tried to walk for one hundred consecutive hours.⁹⁰ An organ grinder appeared in Fort Smith in 1870 and brought the following comment:

Our town has been enlivened for the past few days by the arrival in our midst of a gentleman from the sunny clime of Italy, accompanied by his friend and factotum--a monkey. They favored our citizens with several street corner concerts, performing such delectable and popular airs as--"Sho Fly! don'tt bother me!" and "Wait for the Wagon!" much to the delight of large and critical audiences. We understand they are electioneering for a particular ticket, but this reporter knoweth not.⁹¹

V. SUMMARY

The amusements and entertainments presented for the public of northwest Arkansas in the quarter of a century between 1865 and 1889 were of various forms. The most frequent and most popular single type was the music and variety entertainment. Visits were made by magicians, lecturers, elocutionists, and Indian dancers, as well as medicine shows and panoramas. Most of the exhibitions were well received and enjoyed by the audiences. The citizens of the region were given an opportunity

⁸⁹ Ibid., June 21, 1888.

⁹⁰ Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, December 7, 1871.

⁹¹ Fort Smith New Era, October 27, 1870.

to see most of the popular forms of entertainments which were part of the amusement of the nation during this period.

CHAPTER XII

PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES, 1865-1889

The most common type of professional entertainment during the two and one-half decades following the Civil War was the traveling professional dramatic company. In the early years after the war few companies ventured into the region, but the advent of the railroads and a rapid growth in population and prosperity in the last fifteen years witnessed a steady increase in the number of professional "theatrical combinations" which came to northwest Arkansas. The purpose of this chapter is to present the development of professional dramatic entertainment in the region in three periods. The first will be the decade from 1865-1874, which contained only rare appearances by the "legitimate" dramatic troupes. The second period is the ten years following this, 1875-1884, in which facilities were completed, and a regular increase was noted in the companies which visited the region. The final period is the five-year span from 1885-1889, when the week long stay by the theatrical troupes gave way to the one night stand, and many of the "stars" who appeared had national reputations.

I. THE LEAN POST WAR YEARS, 1865-1874

The earliest professional dramatic company which visited northwest Arkansas after the Civil War was a small one called Hunter's Opera

Troupe and was composed primarily of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hunter.¹ The Hunters performed in Fort Smith during late September and early October, 1886, primarily in farces such as Rough Diamond, Poacher's Doom, and Hole in the Wall.² The little company was well received and the plays were even said to be "a preventative to cholera."³

In 1868 the audiences of Fort Smith were promised a series of performances by "Murry and Loder's legitimate dramatic entertainments," but no indication is given that the "entertainments" arrived.⁴

In October, 1869, the next company visited the region. A Miss Crampton, "well and favorably known in theatre circles, having performed as a star in some of the leading theatres in the United States," was at the head of the company and was supported by H. McDonald and Messrs. Wilkinson and Fuller.⁵ Their fare consisted of melodramas and comedies such as Toodles and Lucretia Borgia.⁶

It is highly likely that this is Charlotte Crampton, reported by T. Allston Brown as the first actress to play Mazeppa.⁷ Brown reports that she was often married, first to a Charles Wilkinson, which

¹Fort Smith Tri-Weekly Herald, September 20, 1866.

²Ibid., October 2, 1866.

³Ibid., September 22, 1866.

⁴Ibid., December 19, 1868.

⁵Fort Smith Weekly Herald, October 23, 1869.

⁶Ibid.

⁷T. Allston Brown, A History of the New York Stage From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1930), I, 332-33.

might account for the presence of the Wilkinson in the troupe. Brown further reports that her second husband was Charles B. Mulholland, one of the mainstays of Nick Moroney's troupe a decade before Miss Crampton appeared in Fort Smith. No report is made of the reception accorded this well-known actress in Fort Smith.

The final company reported in the region before 1875 was a troupe which appeared in August, 1870, and was referred to as The Bailey Troupe, but no facts remain concerning the content of the performances.⁸ The Bailey Troupe did, however, please the audience in Fort Smith and was said to have "given complete satisfaction and gone beyond the most sanguine expectations as to the ability of its several members."⁹

The absence of legitimate theatre companies in the region before 1875 was probably caused by the remoteness of the area. The burgeoning system of railroads throughout the nation had opened much new territory to the traveling theatrical combinations, and they were likely reluctant to travel into untried and inaccessible parts of the country. In 1872 the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad was completed as far as Van Buren, where freight and passengers were transferred for the short trip up the river to Fort Smith.¹⁰ Even this new means of

⁸Fort Smith Weekly Herald, August 27, 1870.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago: The Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), p. 523.

transportation did not seem to induce more professional dramatic companies to visit the region, and the next troupe did not arrive until 1876.

II. DECADE OF GROWTH, 1875-1884

In the ten year period from 1875 to 1884 the theatre audiences of northwest Arkansas witnessed a marked increase in the number of visiting professional dramatic companies. The companies traveled on the recently completed Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad in the Arkansas River valley and performed in the towns along the road. They would play in Dardanelle, Russellville, Clarksville and Ozark before reaching Van Buren and Fort Smith. Several of the combinations however, traveled overland and performed in Fayetteville before that town was connected to Fort Smith and St. Louis by the St. Louis, Arkansas and Texas Railway in 1882.¹¹

The Companies

During this time the troupes which traveled in the region were, for the most part, touring repertory companies. They were usually booked through an advance road agent and would perform for several nights at the local "hall," presenting a new play each night. If the attendance warranted a longer stay, the company would remain a few extra nights and repeat the plays which had been most popular.

¹¹David Y. Thomas (ed.), Arkansas and Its People (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), II, 434.

When the interest of the audience waned, they would move on to the next town.

No regular booking of dramatic troupes in the towns began until the Academy of Music was completed in Fort Smith in the fall of 1883.¹² Mr. J. H. Clendenning, a Fort Smith lawyer, acted as manager of the new building and was able for the first time to book companies on a regular basis. It is incorrect, therefore, to use the term "theatrical season" until after this building was completed, for no regular attempt had been made to schedule a full season of theatrical entertainment until that time. This was due to the absence of a suitable hall or "Opera House" to house the performances.¹³

Beginning in January of 1884 a new trend was evident in the booking of the companies. Some began to appear for shorter periods of time, and a run of a week became increasingly rare from this time forward. The professional dramatic troupes also began to bypass the smaller towns in favor of the larger ones. This left the smaller towns only various musical and variety shows to satisfy their need for theatrical entertainments.

Fort Smith, Fayetteville and Van Buren, in that order, slowly became the centers of the professional dramatic performances in the region. No newspapers are extant for Dardanelle after 1883, so the exact number of appearances is not available, but it probably fared

¹²Fort Smith Elevator, October 12, 1883.

¹³Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, February 28, 1883.

no better than its sister city, Russellville, which had only rare professional dramatic groups during the ensuing years.

The newspapers were frequently negligent in covering all of the performances of the traveling companies. Each company which appeared will be discussed in the following paragraphs. With the exception of the later performances of the Globe Dramatic Troupe and the Mabel Norton Combination, the presentation is chronological.

The Selden Irwin Combination. The first such company to visit the region after 1875 was the Selden Irwin Combination, performing in Fort Smith in April, 1876. The company played in Adelaide Hall for ten nights, and the press accorded it a kind reception. The Fort Smith Weekly Herald labels this company, "the best dramatic troupe that has ever visited our city."¹⁴

The plays which were given for the Fort Smith audiences included Rip Van Winkle, The Two Orphans, and The Hidden Hand, as well as Our American Cousin.¹⁵ The Herald notes that the company's choice of plays allowed the Fort Smith audience to see "nearly all the sensational plays of the season."¹⁶ The cast included Mr. and Mrs. Selden Irwin, Mr. Harry Rainforth, and Misses Tillie Shields and Grace Hezlep. Montie Hernandez, a child star, also traveled with the company.¹⁷

¹⁴Fort Smith Weekly Herald, April 29, 1876.

¹⁵Ibid., April 22, 1876.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., April 29, 1876.

Globe Dramatic Company. While some troupes toured the region only once during this time, two achieved great popularity and returned with some regularity over the years. One of these was the Globe Dramatic Troupe, which made its first appearance in the region in December, 1876. On this initial trip the company performed first in Van Buren, and the Press reports that each performer sustained his part "in a style which shows accurate familiarity with the part for which they are cast, and a correct appreciation of the sentiments of the play."¹⁸

Following a five-day stay in Van Buren, the Globe Dramatic Troupe moved up the river to Fort Smith, where it played from December 11 to 23. The company was scheduled to present Rose Cottage, Man and Wife, Love at Long Branch, and other standard plays of the time.¹⁹ The New Era reports: "Indeed the Globe company consists of artists far superior in their profession to those commonly visiting country towns."²⁰ The Fort Smith Herald was pleased that the choice of plays was "chaste" and the productions were staged with "elegance and taste."²¹

The company next appeared at Baum's Hall in Fayetteville and gave four performances between January 3 and 6. Large audiences

¹⁸Van Buren Press, December 5, 1876.

¹⁹Fort Smith New Era, December 13, 1876.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Fort Smith Weekly Herald, December 16, 1876.

attended in Fayetteville, and the Democrat labels the Globe troupe, "the best company that has ever visited our city."²²

The Globe Company returned to the region in November, 1877, and played at Fayetteville, Russellville, and Dardanelle, and likely in other towns not reported. While it was in Fayetteville on this second tour, the Arkansas Sentinel observes:

The Globe company seems to have lost none of its capacity to entertain our people, but the actors are as popular as ever. The entertainments are instructive and amusing, and we bespeak for the company a liberal patronage during the week. The plays for each evening will be selected from the most popular dramas of the day.²³

The appearance of the troupe in Fayetteville was highlighted by the stage debut of "Little Capitola Moss," the six year old daughter of Mr. S. H. Moss, the manager. She performed several times in Fayetteville, and both papers noted that she was destined for great things.²⁴

Later in November the company stopped at Clarksville and drew "large and delighted audiences,"²⁵ and in December it played in Russellville at College Hall.²⁶ Following the Russellville stay, the company went to Dardanelle, and the Independent Arkansian reports that the actors were "winning golden opinions" while there.²⁷

²²Fayetteville Democrat, January 6, 1877.

²³Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 7, 1877.

²⁴Ibid., November 14, 1877; Fayetteville Democrat, November 10, 1877.

²⁵Russellville Democrat, November 29, 1877.

²⁶Ibid., December 6, 13, and 20, 1877.

²⁷Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, December 21, 1877.

The Globe Dramatic Troupe returned to this area on two other occasions in later years. In April, 1880, it made its second visit to Russellville and Dardanelle.²⁸ In the Collection of Playbills at Harvard College, only one relates to northwest Arkansas, and it is one which was printed by the Russellville Democrat for the opening of the Globe Company in Dardanelle in 1880.²⁹

The plays which began the series of appearances in Dardanelle were Dion Boucicault's, The Rose of Killarney and Denman Thompson's comedy entitled Joshua Whitcomb. The playbill lists H. K. James and R. M. Nelson as the proprietors, and the "star" was "the charming young artiste," Miss Lizzie James. Also noted on the playbill is the fact that the company included a "brass band and Grand Operatic Orchestra."³⁰

After the Globe Dramatic Company left Dardanelle for Ozark, the Independent Arkansian reports:

Their performances were well received but receipts paid the company but little above expenses. The company is composed of a courteous set of gentlemen and respectable ladies, so far as our observation extended. The manager paid all bills promptly and left bearing the kind regards of all who witnessed their performances, or who had business relations with the company.³¹

The final visit of the Globe Dramatic Company to northwest

²⁸Russellville Democrat, April 15 and 20, 1880; Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, April 16 and 23, 1880.

²⁹Playbill, Globe Dramatic Company, Theatre Collection, Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, April 23, 1880.

Arkansas was in November, 1882, and began in Fayetteville from November 5 to 13.³² The Arkansas Sentinel notes that the troupe had left a good impression from an appearance of several years before and was now sustaining the former reputation. The stars on this tour were Mr. and Mrs. Fred Felton, and the Sentinel reports that when they came before the footlights "a general whisper of satisfaction ran through the dress circle and from the rear of the building came loud cheers."³³ While in Fayetteville, the Globe Dramatic Company presented Uncle Tom's Cabin for the first time in the region. The Sentinel notes that although "the South is not a friend to this play . . . everybody likes to see it acted."³⁴

The company went from Fayetteville to Van Buren for only one night, November 15, 1882.³⁵ From there it went directly to Fort Smith for a week, performing at both Gardner's Hall and Botefuhr's Music Hall on Garrison Avenue and sustaining the reputation which The Globe Dramatic Troupe had established over the years.

MacFarland Parlor Dramatic Troupe. In March, 1878, the MacFarland Parlor Dramatic Troupe played in Fort Smith and Van Buren, but little is reported of the visit. Three performances were given by the troupe in Fort Smith, and the final one was a benefit for the fire

³²Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 8 and 15, 1882.

³³Ibid., November 8, 1882.

³⁴Ibid., November 15, 1882.

³⁵Van Buren Press, November 18, 1882.

department of that city.³⁶ The company then crossed the Arkansas River to Van Buren, but the only notice given by the Van Buren Press is a mention of a benefit for the Brass Band.³⁷

The Mabel Norton Combination. Another company which made frequent tours through the region was the "Mabel Norton Combination." The star of this troupe, as the name might suggest, was Mabel Norton, and J. B. Hogan, her husband, was the manager. This combination made at least five tours to the region between 1880 and 1885. The first tour was in December, 1880, and January, 1881, and encompassed Russellville, Dardanelle, Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Fayetteville. The company consisted of sixteen "ladies and gentlemen, whose deportment . . . entitles them to the appellation . . . ladies and gentlemen."³⁸ The actors were well received in all of the towns on this first visit. Their greatest success, however, was in Fort Smith, where the first stay was extended to a total of fourteen days.³⁹ A "lady compositor" for Wheeler's Independent sums up the reception of the troupe:

The Mabel Norton Troupe has come and gone "like a beautiful dream." Beautiful indeed, no one can deny its beauty. Ft. Smith has had a rare treat, which she fully appreciated, judging by the full houses night after night, notwithstanding the unusually cold and disagreeable weather, and if they come back in the spring, which we heartily hope they will, why BROGAN'S HALL will not hold the enthusiastic crowd who will come to welcome

³⁶Fort Smith Daily Herald, March 19, 1878.

³⁷Van Buren Press, April 2, 1878.

³⁸Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, December 24, 1880.

³⁹Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, January 19, 1881.

them back as old friends for by their own pleasant gentlemanly and lady-like manners, one and all, they have come here strangers and gone away friends.⁴⁰

The popularity of the Mabel Norton Combination with the Fort Smith audience was evidenced when it appeared across the river at Van Buren, and Col. Dunham, editor of the Van Buren Press reports:

The popularity of the Mabel Norton Troupe may be comprehended when it is known that twenty seats were taken Wednesday night, by Fort Smithers, to witness the drama of the "Man of Mystery." Several of their citizens have gone crazy, and it is reported will follow the troupe to Fayetteville next week.⁴¹

This report is answered by J. E. Brietz, editor of Wheeler's Independent in Fort Smith.

Dear Col. Dunham: We really can't see anything "crazy" in our young people enjoying an excursion to Van Buren, even if it was to "witness the Man of Mystery" played by the Mabel Norton Troupe. There is evidently some mystery at the bottom of the Col.'s remarks which can only be explained in the fact that it always takes Fort Smith people to give cast and character to anything gotten up in Van Buren.⁴²

The ruffled feelings raised by the first report are soothed by Col. Dunham in the next issue of the Press.

"Caste and Character," are good and it is just possibly so, Bro. Brietz. But wasn't there a "soft spot," just a little, that should induce such a good looking and apparently very sensible party, on so cold a night, and having to foot it over the river on the ice, to attend the exhibition of a company that had already exhausted itself in a two week's playing to the citizens of Fort Smith. Be assured my young friend, we did not

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Van Buren Press, January 15, 1881.

⁴²Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, January 19, 1881.

intend any disrespect for the little party, for we have too kindly a feeling for them.⁴³

The Mabel Norton Combination cancelled an appearance in Alma in order to spend two more nights in Van Buren to take advantage of the "pecuniary-cordiality of their reception," there.⁴⁴ The troupe ended this first tour of the region with a visit to Fayetteville.⁴⁵

The success of the Mabel Norton Combination on its initial tour led to a second one made later in the spring of 1881. The company played in the same towns visited on the first trip with the exception of Fayetteville.

Again it was at Fort Smith that the combination received the greatest reception. Wheeler's Independent was the leader in words of praise. The final review contains a lengthy appraisal of the company which concludes:

The company, in its management, has an excellent reputation for integrity in its business transactions with the public, its observance of legal ordinances, and that good order and decorum which is so essential to an evening's enjoyment in a crowded theatre; and should we not encourage worthy and humble thespians, who risk much in traveling at great expense through a thinly settled border country to devote their time and talents to our occasional enjoyment and amusement in the dull routine of labor and business. We think so, and should be glad to see them come again.⁴⁶

The Van Buren Press scoffs at the unqualified praise given by

⁴³Van Buren Press, January 22, 1881.

⁴⁴Ibid., January 15, 1881.

⁴⁵Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, January 19, 1881.

⁴⁶Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, May 18, 1881.

the Independent and Col. Dunham writes

It is said that Edwin Booth, the great American Tragedian, now playing in London to immense houses, after reading the gush of the Fort Smith Independent over the Mabel Norton Combination, telegraphed immediately to engage Devaney Hall for a week during the summer.⁴⁷

While the criticism in Wheeler's Independent cannot be accepted as objective, neither can the totally negative review published in the Van Buren Press, in which the editor writes that the company "mercilessly murdered" Joshua Whitcomb.⁴⁸ The following week the Press accuses the company of passing bogus money and ventures to assert that the Mabel Norton Combination would "not show their faces on the theatrical boards" of any city of prominence.⁴⁹ This attack by the editor of the Van Buren Press is the only adverse criticism which the company received in five visits to the region.

The third appearance of the Mabel Norton Combination was highly anticipated by the citizens of Fort Smith. It came directly from Chicago to Fort Smith to open the fall tour in August, 1882, and this coming prompted the editor of Wheeler's Independent to publish an eloquent defense of the theatre. He writes:

The theatre is a great educator of the people. It should be favored by the church and patronized by the government. On the contrary, it is oppressed by one and persecuted by the other, and yet they cannot suppress it. Amusement is as necessary for the better development of the intellect as it is to the

⁴⁷ Van Buren Press, May 21, 1881.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., May 28, 1881.

healthier condition of the mind. It was the drama that gave Greece its intellectual supremacy and made not only a sense of the beautiful a national characteristic, but patriotic heroism the heritage of that immortal race.

The poorest laborer in the European cities has access to the theatre, where for a few hours he forgets his toils in the music that pleases his ear, the paintings that please the eye, and above all, the poetry and eloquence that charms the heart and appeals to our better and finer sensibilities. And while on the subject we will state that amusements are rare, and whenever our town is visited by worthy talent, it is meet that we should encourage the enterprise. The way of the traveling actor is hard. He is overtaxed in every village he strikes by heavy licenses, and but a very small amount of his receipts go into his pocket, while his profession is the study and labor of his life, it is for your amusement and also for your family, and the moral lessons taught the young on the stage by the actor, may make a more lasting impression than learned in any other way.⁵⁰

In Fort Smith the Mabel Norton troupe was greeted by capacity audiences. Opening night was scheduled at Botefuhr's Music Hall on Garrison Avenue, but because of the large audience, this hall was deemed unsafe, and the location changed to Roger's New Hall farther up the Avenue.⁵¹ The company played in Fort Smith for seven performances and the plays presented were: Divorced or Rose Cottage, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, East Lynne, Ten Nights in a Bar Room, The Octoroon, Joshua Whitcomb, and Hazel Kirke. This selection was typical of the bills of plays which were offered to the Fort Smith audiences during this time. All of them were standard dramas, well-known throughout the nation.

In a review of the week's offerings each play is singled out

⁵⁰Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, August 30, 1882.

⁵¹Ibid., September 6, 1882.

for a word of praise. Ten Nights in a Bar Room is reported as never having been played in Fort Smith "with greater effect." Little Leotie, daughter of Miss Norton and J. B. Hogan, the manager, is said to have "drawn forth the genuine Turk's Island brine of sympathy" in the death-bed scene. Each of the other dramas was "well sustained throughout."⁵²

While in Fort Smith the brass band appeared daily in full dress uniform "of beautiful grey, trimmed in artillery red and gold lace, with military caps with red and white plumes." The orchestra performed each evening and "was considered the best that ever played at the footlights in this city."⁵³

The third visit of the Mabel Norton Combination to Fort Smith is summed up in Wheeler's Independent.

The third visit of the Mabel Norton Combination had a tendency not only to renew the pleasures of a former acquaintance with the people of Fort Smith, but brought with them new attractions which have enhanced a still higher appreciation of their worth and merit as a theatrical combination

We regret that the Mabel Norton Combination cannot make it to their interest to remain longer with us, but if they must go, the best wishes of hosts of friends here will accompany them, while it is hoped they will bear with them favorable impressions of Fort Smith audiences.⁵⁴

The next report of the Mabel Norton Combination came a week later from Dardanelle and stated that the troupe performed in the Knights of Honor Hall on September 12, 13, and 14 and was greeted by full

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

houses.⁵⁵ The company's next performance was in Russellville.

Colonel Mulberry Sellers and Hazel Kirke were the plays presented and are reported to have been "rendered in excellent style, winning for the company the heartiest praise."⁵⁶

The fourth visit of the Mabel Norton Combination came in the spring of 1883. On this tour the company stopped in Russellville, Dardanelle, Van Buren, and Fort Smith, and Wheeler's Independent notes that the cast had been quite stable in the years that it had been coming to Fort Smith.

The original troupe with but few exceptions remains intact, and consists of J. B. Hogan and lady and little daughter, Leota, Mr. and Mrs. Streeper, the accomplished sisters, the misses Gates, and Messrs. Birch, Percell, Robinson, Hoyt, Wales and Cotton.⁵⁷

This was the fourth time in the region for most of these performers, and by now they were well-known to the people of the towns. When Col. Hogan came over to Fort Smith from Van Buren to make arrangements for the company he "had to go slow on the Avenue, so numerous were his friends that he could scarcely get to his hotel or the nearest sa____, we forgot, he's a prohibitionist."⁵⁸ The popularity of the actors increased when they gave a benefit for the widow of a train

⁵⁵Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, September 8 and 15, 1882.

⁵⁶Russellville Democrat, September 21, 1882.

⁵⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, April 11, 1883.

⁵⁸Ibid., April 4, 1883.

conductor who had recently been killed. The benefit netted \$70.25 for the aid fund.⁵⁹

The Mabel Norton Combination made a final tour of the region in the fall of 1884 and performed in Van Buren and Fayetteville. Again the company was well received, and in Fayetteville "each audience departed from the hall well pleased with the entertainment."⁶⁰

The Stuttz Star Combination. In 1881 the Stuttz Star Combination appeared in Dardanelle and Russellville in May, and in July performed in Fayetteville. The company played in Dardanelle for a week and received good notices while there.⁶¹ The selection of plays presented was varied and included Fanchon, the Cricket, Lucretia Borgia, Lady of Lyons and Hamlet.⁶² The cast featured Prof. J. George Stuttz and his wife, Mrs. El. Alma Stuttz, both of whom were reported to be equally at home in tragedy or comedy.⁶³

When the troupe was in Russellville the Democrat does not present an extensive notice of the performance but does list more of the names of the actors. Other members included Messrs. C. T. Wolfe, Barlow, and Edwin Stuttz, as well as a Miss Sabini.⁶⁴ The paper announces that the company would go from Russellville to Ozark and thence to Eureka Springs.⁶⁵

⁵⁹Fort Smith Elevator, April 20, 1883.

⁶⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 19, 1884.

⁶¹Dardanelle Independent Arkansian, May 20 and 27, 1881.

⁶²Ibid., May 20, 1881. ⁶³Ibid., May 27, 1881.

⁶⁴Russellville Democrat, May 26, 1881.

⁶⁵Ibid.

The company next appeared in Fayetteville from July 16 to 21. The entrance into Fayetteville was given little notice, but the exit received ample space.

Where, oh, where, is the celebrated Stuttz Dramatic Company, of "16 ladies and gentlemen?" Our community--especially the hotel keepers, became very much attached to them, at least ten dollars worth. We thirst for heavy tragedy. The Stuttz Company is conducted solely on "dead-beat" principles.⁶⁶

This occurrence was probably the reason that the Stuttz Combination was not seen in the region again.

Fay Templeton Opera Company. The first full-scale opera company to appear in northwest Arkansas was the Fay Templeton Opera Troupe, which played in Fort Smith on the 16 and 17 of February, 1883. Little information remains of this visit. Wheeler's Independent notes it only briefly:

The Fay Templeton Opera Troupe filled an engagement in this city Friday and Saturday nights of last week. Notwithstanding the Lenten Season, they had crowded houses, which fully attests appreciation.⁶⁷

The operas presented or the personnel of the company is not known.

Forhan Comedy Company. The Forhan Comedy Company entered northwest Arkansas from Missouri and gave its first series of plays at Fayetteville in February, 1883. The troupe starred Simon J. Forhan and Eunice Goodrich and presented standard drama and comedy. The

⁶⁶Fayetteville Democrat, August 4, 1881.

⁶⁷Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, February 21, 1883.

week's run opened with Kilrush on February 12 and played Flirtation, Joshua Whitcomb, Two Orphans, and Zizi during the week. The performance in the city was commended by both papers. The Arkansas Sentinel gives it a good recommendation to other towns in the region.

Our citizens were well pleased and agreeably entertained, and greeted the troupe every night with good houses. Saturday night the audience was larger than ever before, which shows that they gained favor as they became better known. They left satisfied themselves and left us satisfied, and we hope to see them with us again.⁶⁸

The company met with equal success in Fort Smith. Wheeler's Independent, a stalwart supporter of the Mabel Norton Combination in times past, even goes so far as to state that the Forhan troupe is likely "to successfully rival the favorite Mabel Norton in point of popularity."⁶⁹ While in Fort Smith, Forhan became a great favorite with the audiences and was said to be "simply inimitable."⁷⁰ The Elevator reports that Forhan, "as a funmaker cannot be excelled, and his natural and easy style of comedy is very taking; in fact, it seems an effort to him to avoid being funny."⁷¹

The company left Fort Smith and played in Van Buren for three nights at the end of February.⁷² Ozark and Clarksville were probably the next towns visited, for the next mention in the regional papers

⁶⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 21, 1883.

⁶⁹Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, February 21, 1883.

⁷⁰Fort Smith New Era, February 22, 1883.

⁷¹Fort Smith Elevator, February 23, 1883.

⁷²Van Buren Press, March 3, 1883.

comes in Dardanelle, where the Dardanelle Post reports a successful three-day engagement on March 12, 13, and 14.⁷³ The company then went to Russellville and opened a three-day appearance on March 15 with a performance of Kilrush.⁷⁴

From Russellville the troupe returned to Fayetteville for a second engagement from March 22 to 25. Again the papers contain a flood of unqualified praise for Miss Goodrich and Forhan, as well as Harry Loomis, a featured member of the cast.⁷⁵ The company went from Fayetteville to Bentonville, but no record of a performance in that town remains.

John E. Ince Comedy Company. This company played in Fort Smith for only two nights in March, 1883. No facts are available concerning the plays or the actors. The one notice states:

The John E. Ince Comedy Company amused our citizens at Music Hall on Friday and Saturday nights of last week. The attendance was large at each performance and those who witnessed it, pronounce this company for its size and kind, one of the best on the road.⁷⁶

The Eunice Goodrich Combination. The first professional dramatic company to appear in the 1883-1884 season was the Eunice Goodrich Combination. Miss Goodrich had visited the region earlier

⁷³Dardanelle Post, March 15, 1883.

⁷⁴Russellville Democrat, March 15, 1883.

⁷⁵Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, March 28, 1883.

⁷⁶Fort Smith Wheeler's Independent, March 7, 1883.

that year with the Forhan Comedy Company and had since entered the field with her own company. She performed in Fayetteville and Fort Smith in early October. While in Fayetteville the troupe presented Belasco's American Born on October 8 and Wanted, a Husband on October 9.⁷⁷ These two plays are reported to have given "entire satisfaction."⁷⁸

Following this stop in Fayetteville, the Eunice Goodrich Combination was the first professional dramatic company to appear in the new Academy of Music building in Fort Smith. For four nights it played before good houses, and the Independent True Democrat concludes: "Miss Goodrich sustained her previous reputation as an actress and the remainder of the company came fully up to the standard of successful dramatists."⁷⁹ Fayetteville and Fort Smith were the only towns in the region visited on this tour.

St. Quinten Opera Company. In the fall the St. Quinten Opera Company came to northwest Arkansas. The first city visited was Dardanelle, and the Dardanelle Post says: "Is is the first time in the history of this place that genuine opera has ever been presented. . . ."⁸⁰

⁷⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 3, 1883.

⁷⁸Ibid., October 10, 1883.

⁷⁹Fort Smith Independent True Democrat, October 17, 1883.

⁸⁰Dardanelle Post, November 22, 1883.

While in Dardanelle the company performed La Mascotte on November 16 and The Chimes of Normandie on the next evening. The only occurrence to mar the success of the appearance of Miss Quentin was the erratic ferry boat which connected Dardanelle with Russellville. A group of fifty ladies and gentlemen came to Dardanelle from Russellville to see the opera on the first night but due to some misunderstanding was detained on the other side of the river and missed the first act completely.⁸¹ This led to a warning by the advance agent of the opera company, published in the Van Buren Argus: "I would advise all companies to avoid Dardanelle and Russellville as long as the means of transit remains in the hands of the ferry boat owner."⁸² In spite of this the stay in Dardanelle was successful.

The opera company went to Van Buren next and performed on November 19 and 20.⁸³ In Van Buren the operas were staged without an orchestra, and the Van Buren Press notes: "The absence of an orchestra--although the pianist was a grand performer--detracted materially from the music enchantment."⁸⁴

The company next appeared in Fort Smith, and the audiences were promised that the operas were comic "which have an advantage over the usual operatic pieces which but so few enjoy, but in these all, whether lovers of music or not, can enjoy them."⁸⁵ While in Fort

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Van Buren Argus, n.d., quoted by Dardanelle Post, November 29, 1883.

⁸³Van Buren Press, November 24, 1883. ⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Fort Smith Elevator, November 23, 1883.

Smith the troupe staged La Mascotte, Chimes of Normandy, and Iolanthe, and both Miss St. Quinten and William Wolfe, the "basso profundo," "received many high compliments for their excellence" and "they well sustained the reputation that preceded them."⁸⁶

Following Fort Smith, the company traveled north to Fayetteville for performances on November 26 and 27. The Fayetteville audience saw La Mascotte and The Bells of Corneville, and a notice says: "One of the best companies that has visited the city for several years."⁸⁷

The E. E. Basye's Standard Dramatic Company. The second professional dramatic company of the fall came to Fort Smith in December, 1883. Basye's Standard Dramatic Company opened at the new Academy of Music and played for four nights.⁸⁸

The featured members of the troupe were Miss Maude Atkinson and Frank P. Lindon. The actors presented The Galley Slave and Fanchon, the Cricket, both reported to be "presented in a masterly manner, every attention being paid to all the minor details. . . ."⁸⁹ Some difficulty with the manager arose in Fort Smith, and an article in the Van Buren Press suggests that the company had disbanded when he posted a two weeks' notice to the cast.⁹⁰ Although the company had advertised to

⁸⁶Fort Smith Independent True Democrat, November 7, 1883.

⁸⁷Fayetteville Democrat, November 22, 1883.

⁸⁸Fort Smith New Era, December 20, 1883.

⁸⁹Fort Smith Elevator, December 14, 1883.

⁹⁰Van Buren Press, December 22, 1883.

perform in Van Buren following the Fort Smith appearance, there is no indication given that it fulfilled this engagement.

The Lizzie Evans Dramatic Troupe. The Lizzie Evans Troupe first appeared in the region in Fort Smith on January 19 and 20, 1884, but the efforts of the group received no notice in the local press. A notice of the performance finally was published in March, and the names of the plays were given. They were Fogg's Ferry and Dew Drop, but no critical evaluation is extant.⁹¹

The Spott's Comedy Company. In March of 1884 the Spott's Comedy Company gave three performances in the area. The first was on March 24 in Fort Smith and was a production of Everybody's Friend, starring Miss Adrienne Mitchell. A review states:

The playing might have been better; in fact, it was generally conceded that it could not have been much worse, and the greater part of what might have been a large audience--the part that remained at home--was doubtless highly pleased.⁹²

The next two performances were in Van Buren and were no better received. The fact that some members of the company left town without paying their hotel bills did not help their reputation in that town.⁹³

Charlotte Thompson Combination. In May of 1884 Charlotte Thompson appeared at Fort Smith and Van Buren. No report of her acting

⁹¹Fort Smith Daily Tribune, March 16, 1884.

⁹²Ibid., March 25, 1884.

⁹³Van Buren Press, March 29, 1884.

in Fort Smith is extant, but a brief review remains of the performance at Van Buren, where the company presented Jane Eyre.

A large audience attended the theatre Wednesday night. The Charlotte Thompson troupe is the best that has visited the city and all would be pleased to have her return this way in the future.⁹⁴

The Streeper Dramatic Company. In the fall the 1884-1885 season was opened by Streeper's Dramatic Company in Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Fayetteville. The manager was Joe Streeper, a former member of the Mabel Norton troupe, and the cast featured L. R. Warwick, another former member of the Mabel Norton Company.⁹⁵ The plays presented in Fort Smith were: The Ocean of Life, The Phoenix, Trodden Down or Under Two Flags, and, by special request, Warwick in The Marble Heart. While in Fort Smith, the group won new friends by having "Streeper's Cornet Band" play for the funeral of a local doctor. One observer writes: "It was an act, beaming alike with true respect and a higher order of feeling and was appreciated by the friends of the lamented dead--by our people entire."⁹⁶

The Streeper Company's appearance in Van Buren was not so successful, and the Press reports: "The Streeper's Dramatic Company, traveling on the Mabel Norton prestige, came very near flattening out in the city. They went limping over the mountain."⁹⁷

⁹⁴Ibid., May 24, 1884.

⁹⁵Fort Smith Daily Tribune, September 14, 1884.

⁹⁶Ibid., September 18, 1884.

⁹⁷Van Buren Press, September 27, 1884.

The company next went to Fayetteville, and receives scant praise from the Arkansas Sentinel.

As a whole, the company did not come up to our expectations but the great dramatic star, Louis R. Warwick, like a magnet drew all attention to his part, and in the perfection of his acting, the audience, to some extent, lost sight of the others. Mr. Warwick never fails to please no matter how poor his support may be. Geo. Robinson, Bennett Rundquist, T. D. Morris and Julia Bennett carry their parts to some degree of perfection and deserve some praise. Miss Mizener, while she tries hard to win and please, and is a very pleasant young lady, is evidently acting out of her role and will never succeed in tragedy.⁹⁸

The only other commendation is offered to the brass band which accompanied the troupe. The company is reported to have moved from Fayetteville to Rogers and Bentonville before leaving the state.⁹⁹

Graves and Kempton Chicago Comedy Company. Each fall a major event in the region was the Fort Smith Fair. After the Academy of Music was built in Fort Smith, it was customary to bring in a company to play in the city during Fair Week. In 1884 the graves and Kempton Chicago Comedy Company was booked in the Academy of Music for Fair Week. The day prior to the initial appearance at Fort Smith, this company gave one performance across the river at the McKibben Opera House in Van Buren, presenting Van, the Virginian. The Press writes: "The band and orchestra were grand, and as we said at the start, the company was the best and won universal admiration."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 24, 1884.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Van Buren Press, October 18, 1884.

The Fort Smith stay was from October 14 to 18 and featured Fred Felton and Miss Alice H. Clarke.¹⁰¹ The plays presented were Van, the Virginian, Banker's Daughter, Queen's Evidence, Colonel Mulberry Sellers and Joshua Whitcomb.

The company left Fort Smith and possibly made only one other stop in the region. The Russellville Democrat carried an advertisement for Van, the Virginian on October 23, but no record is extant of a performance.¹⁰²

Maude Atkinson Theatrical Combination. Following the Mabel Norton Combination in Fayetteville and Van Buren in November, 1884, the Maude Atkinson Combination appeared in December in Fort Smith. This company played from December 20 to 27 and was well received. The plays which were presented were The Lady of Lyons, Queen's Evidence, Hazel Kirke, and The Two Orphans. Besides Miss Atkinson the cast featured Messrs. Walter Adrian, D. F. Fox and Dick Johnson.¹⁰³

Summary

In the ten-year period from 1875-1884, a slow but steady increase was seen in the number of professional dramatic companies that visited northwest Arkansas. In the early years of the decade, the majority were traveling repertory companies, but this was changing by

¹⁰¹Fort Smith Daily Tribune, October 11, 1884.

¹⁰²Russellville Democrat, October 23, 1884.

¹⁰³Fort Smith Daily Tribune, December 24, 1884.

the 1884-1885 season. The completion of the rail facilities not only made the region more accessible, but also made it more convenient for the companies to bypass the smaller towns. This resulted in a decrease in dramatic performances in Russellville and Dardanelle by the end of the ten-year period.

The types of plays presented were standard, light comedies and melodramas, with an occasional work by Shakespeare.

This decade saw the growth and decline of the traveling repertory troupe in the region. The two most popular companies, the Globe, and the Mabel Norton Company, achieved success with the audiences by careful attention to their image so that they were rarely challenged on the propriety of actors or performances.

By the end of the ten years the companies would not tarry long enough to make friends with the local audiences and townspeople, and the theatre became a little more impersonal, ultimately resulting in the one night stands during the next five years.

III. FULL SEASONS AND STARS, 1885-1889

As the booking of the road shows became more organized, Fort Smith took the lead as the theatre center of the region. The company which would come into the region and play each of the towns was seen no more. Even a run of more than one or two days in any one town became a rarity. With the frequency of the visiting companies, the coverage in the local press became erratic. In the one extant newspaper which covers the period from 1885 to 1889, few reviews, as such, are given.

Most of the information carried by the paper was in the form of publicity, and this only rarely. It is even difficult to reconstruct with any accuracy some of the last seasons, because so little information is available. Since seasonal bookings of the troupes became more commonplace, the remaining five years of performances will be presented according to theatre seasons.

January-June, 1885

The last half of the 1884-1885 season was uneventful. The Lizzie Evans Company appeared in Van Buren and Fort Smith in early February. Miss Evans' performance in Van Buren as "Chip" in Fogg's Ferry was greeted "with the largest audience ever given to a performance of this kind."¹⁰⁴ Miss Evans repeated the role the next night at the Academy of Music in Fort Smith. The Daily Tribune explains the plot of Fogg's Ferry.

It is the work of the type made familiar by Lotta and Maggie Mitchell's repertoire, and hinges upon the plots of a villain and the successful counterplots of a particularly bright and heydenish [sic] young person who, being aware, from the very outset of affairs that all difficulties she is to overcome, have been set up like as many ten pins, solely to be knocked down, moves through the action with unvarying briskness and ease.¹⁰⁵

The company presented a matinee of Dew Drop on the afternoon of February 4 and in the evening offered a "rendition" of Maud Muller.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Van Buren Press, February 7, 1885.

¹⁰⁵Daily Fort Smith Tribune, February 4, 1885.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., February 5, 1885.

The next attraction was Flora Moore in a single performance in Fort Smith of A Bunch of Keys, or The Hotel. The large audience is reported to have been "kept in a continual uproar of laughter the entire evening by the many ridiculous sayings and gestures of almost every member of the company."¹⁰⁷

Following Miss Moore, Fred Warde, "the eminent tragedian," presented a series of three performances in Fort Smith. The first night, February 23, Warde offered Richard III to the Fort Smith audience. The Daily Tribune reports:

Mr. Warde has more force and greater power than many of our great tragedians. He has a greater range of voice than McCullough. His dream is more realistic and his combat with Richmond so extremely effective that the audience is fairly thrilled by its startling realism. In short, Mr. Warde acted throughout with vigor and brilliancy, and his success of Richard is one of genuine ability and one that will last.¹⁰⁸

The second night Warde starred in Richelieu before a capacity audience. The following day's review in the Daily Tribune makes the following observation about Warde's acting.

His playing is marked by an ampleness of gesture, a vividness of facial expression and a hot vehemence of speech and manner that did not seem out of accord with the declamatory character of the language of the role. In every scene Mr. Warde's acting carried with it the feeling of the audience like some mighty flood, yet, it was satisfactory to note throughout the disciplined impetus of the artist, negligent of no detail of stage business, even when the surrender to the inspiration of the moment seemed most complete.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Ibid., February 21, 1885.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., February 24, 1885.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., February 25, 1885.

The last night of his stay Warde performed Othello. The praise of the other reviews is superceded by a new burst which proclaims that, as Othello, "Mr. Warde reached the acme of his art."¹¹⁰

The gallant soldier, ardent lover, dignified husband, and jealous demon all received at his hands a demonstration which established him as a tragedian second to none in the ranks of dramatic stars. Every emotion from the first appearance of the Moor when summoned to appear before the council, to his final act of self-destruction received from this talented artist a delineation so faithfully drawn, so perfectly carried out, as to leave nothing to be desired on the part of those who witnessed with intense interest the fascinating performance.¹¹¹

While in Fort Smith, Warde celebrated his thirty-fourth birthday with a dinner at Mivelaz's restaurant, and included some sightseeing in his leisure time. The Tribune reports that he visited the United States Court and saw the scaffold on which sixty-two men had been executed.¹¹²

More than any other actor who had visited the region up to this time, Fred Warde had the aura of a "Great Star" and was so treated by the press and public. His stay was quite successful, and he was encouraged to return as soon as possible. Warde's appearances closed the season on the professional dramatic companies.

The Season of 1885-1886

The first company to visit the region in the fall of 1885 was the Max Thomas Opera Company, which "opened the opera season" in Fort

¹¹⁰Ibid., February 26, 1885.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., February 25, 1885.

Smith on September 2.¹¹³

The Clifford Dramatic Company came next, and the Van Buren Press notes that it played in Fort Smith during the week of October 12, and quotes the evaluation of the first performance as published in the Daily Fort Smith Tribune.

The sterling old favorite drama, Davy Crockett, was presented last night by the Clifford Dramatic Company, Mr. Edmund Clifford portraying in the most natural manner the illiterate yet noble hearted hero, Davy Crockett. In his portrayal of the character, Mr. Clifford showed up to the best advantage and for the second time convinced our theatre-goers that he is a strong, conscientious actor, presenting his work in a smooth, yet vigorous style. The support given Mr. Clifford by his company is excellent but serves better to please the audience.¹¹⁴

The company opened in Van Buren, October 19-21, 1885, with The Count of Monte Cristo and was greeted by full houses on all nights.¹¹⁵

The Jennie Holman Combination was playing in Fayetteville at the same time that the Clifford Company was in Van Buren. The Holman troupe opened a six night run in Van Winkle Hall in Fayetteville on the evening of October 19 with a performance of Fanchon, the Cricket,¹¹⁶ and followed this with Hazel Kirke, The Planter's Wife, The Octoroon, The Banker's Daughter, and Ten Nights in a Bar Room. All were well attended, and Miss Holman was described as "an actress of rare powers

¹¹³Fort Smith Elevator, September 4, 1885.

¹¹⁴Daily Fort Smith Tribune, n.d., quoted by Van Buren Press, October 17, 1885.

¹¹⁵Van Buren Press, October 24, 1885.

¹¹⁶Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 22, 1885.

and has but few equals among the traveling companies."¹¹⁷ Miss Lizzie Gray and Otto H. Krause also drew praise for their performances.

Later in October, Robert McWade appeared for one night in Fayetteville as Rip Van Winkle, perhaps the only time he ever played this role in a theatre called "Van Winkle Hall." The Democrat reports:

His impersonaification [sic] of Rip Van Winkle was almost perfect and the scene of his departure from home before his sleep of 20 years brought tears to the eyes of the ladies. The alarm of fire at the close of the second act created quite a panic in the audience but quiet was finally restored and the play went on with much interest to the end. All who heard him are of the opinion that McWade is rightfully entitled to his national fame.¹¹⁸

Few other records of this season remain. A performance of Peck's Bad Boy was announced for Fayetteville in January,¹¹⁹ and also was scheduled for Van Buren on the evening of January 12.¹²⁰

The season doubtless had many other attractions, but the extant newspapers contain no further information. At the end of the season, Fort Smith was still the only town in the region with a regular manager for its opera house, and the highlight of the season had been the appearance of Fred Warde in the fall.

The Season of 1886-1887

Precise information on this season is also scant. The first

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Fayetteville Democrat, November 5, 1885.

¹¹⁹Ibid., January 7, 1886.

¹²⁰Van Buren Press, January 9, 1886.

event on record is the October appearance of the Eunice Goodrich Combination in Fort Smith during Fair Week.¹²¹ After Fort Smith, the troupe gave a single performance in Van Buren on October 17.¹²²

In November the Jennie Holman Combination returned to Fort Smith for the week of November 1. This was advertised as "the people's company, which charges moderate admission that is 10, 20, and 30 cents and compares favorably with high priced companies."¹²³

The Standard Uncle Tom's Cabin Company scheduled a production in Russellville in December. The advance publicity states:

To those who have never seen it we would say "go by all means." They carry all the scenery for the proper production of the play, the blood hounds, colored Jubilee singers, a large company of 16 people, and the allegorical tableau "Eva in Heaven" and the "Beautiful Gate Ajar." Go and see Marks, Topsy, Uncle Tom, Aunt Ophelia, Gumbleton, Cute, and laugh and cry.¹²⁴

The appearance was on December 19, and the Democrat offers only a few words of praise.

The Standard Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. appeared at Luker and Davis' Opera House, last Monday evening, before a large and fashionable audience. The performance as given here fell far short of the excellence expected from the reports that preceeded the show. Barring the two characters of "Uncle Tom" and little "Eva" which were fairly well presented, the cast was amateurish to a painful degree. Our people were disappointed.¹²⁵

¹²¹Fort Smith Elevator, October 15, 1886.

¹²²Van Buren Press, October 22, 1886.

¹²³Fort Smith Elevator, November 5, 1886.

¹²⁴Russellville Democrat, December 15, 1886.

¹²⁵Ibid., December 22, 1886.

The Sisson and Cawthorn's Little Nugget Comedy Company played in Van Buren on the night of January 4, 1887. It was pronounced as "decidedly the best entertainment in Van Buren for a long time."¹²⁶ No indication is given of what play was presented in Van Buren.

In January the Fort Smith Elevator reports:

Several theatrical combinations have visited our city recently, but of all of them, none have attracted particular note. However, Fred Warde will be here next month and all can expect a good time.¹²⁷

This engagement by Warde was fulfilled on February 17, 18, and 19, but went unnoticed by the Elevator. The Van Buren Press, however, notes the appearance since thirty or forty couples of young people went from Van Buren to Warde's performance of Richelieu. The Fort Smith Times is quoted by the Press as ridiculing Van Buren people for buying gallery instead of orchestra seats.¹²⁸ This prompts the Press to a strong defense of the Van Buren townspeople who attended the performance.

What are gallery seats to an Opera House? It is well-known to everyone that they are HALF PRICE TICKETS or less, and the character of the occupants of the "gallery" are frequently not just what they should be. The outrageous imputation of the Times was, that the elite of Van Buren was not willing to take a full price first-class seat, but sent young men to contract for tickets in the gallery at half price. We learn the Times, which by the way was not sent to us and we have not seen it, was loaded with billingsgate, characteristic of the editor, personal to ourself. That we care not for. It only more fully confirms the fact that the writer of the Times article is a lower whelp than it was

¹²⁶Van Buren Press, January 8, 1887.

¹²⁷Fort Smith Elevator, January 14, 1887.

¹²⁸Fort Smith Times, n.d., quoted by Van Buren Press, February 19, 1887.

possible for us to suppose he could be. We are not surprised that the good people of Fort Smith should rise up and denounce the contemptible reflection cast upon our young people.¹²⁹

In March the Van Buren Press carries a notice of an upcoming production of Only a Farmer's Daughter, "interpreted by a Metropolitan cast" wearing "magnificent costumes by Worth."¹³⁰ No report exists of the Van Buren performance, but the company did play in Russellville on March 18 to a meager audience.¹³¹

No other professional dramatic companies are on record for this season.

The 1887-1888 Season

Two major changes occurred in theatrical circles in the region at the start of this season. In late September the Grand Opera House was completed in Fort Smith giving that city the most elaborate and comfortable theatre building in northwest Arkansas.¹³² George Tilles was selected as manager of the theatre, which could accommodate almost any size show then traveling. To the north in Fayetteville, Wood's Opera House was completed in August, and the selection of a manager permitted the city's first systematic booking of theatrical events for the new season.¹³³ Because Fayetteville and Fort Smith dominated the

¹²⁹Van Buren Press, February 26, 1887.

¹³⁰Ibid., March 19, 1887

¹³¹Russellville Democrat, March 23, 1887.

¹³²Fort Smith Elevator, September 30, 1887.

¹³³Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, August 30, 1887.

region as centers of theatrical entertainment, and because the two towns, for the most part, booked different companies, the season in each town will be discussed separately.

Fort Smith. The 1887-1888 season in Fort Smith started with the opening of the Grand Opera House in October. Lizzie Evans gave the initial performance in Our Angel.¹³⁴ The Elevator reports: "Miss Evans, as usual, carried her part to perfection, and her support by the company was equally good."¹³⁵

The next two professional dramatic stars who were booked were Miss Florine Arnold in Machael Strogoff and Jennie Yeamos in Our Jennie.¹³⁶ Neither appearance is confirmed in the Elevator, but both engagements were probably fulfilled. A production of Evangeline at the Fort Smith Grand Opera House was noted by the Van Buren Press in mid-November.¹³⁷

In November the patrons of the Grand Opera House complained that there were too many members of the audience who "went out between acts," and were a nuisance for the audience.¹³⁸ Toward the end of November, George Tilles, "by offering extraordinary inducements," secured an engagement with Barry and Fay, Irish Comedians, and scheduled

¹³⁴Fort Smith Elevator, October 14, 1887.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., October 28, 1887.

¹³⁷Van Buren Press, November 12, 1887.

¹³⁸Daily Fort Smith Tribune, n.d., quoted by Fayetteville Democrat, November 18, 1887.

them for "the famous comedy" entitled Irish Aristocracy, or Muldoon's Picnic on November 28 and 29.¹³⁹

The Jennie Holman Theatrical Company returned to Fort Smith and played to crowded houses at the Grand Opera House from December 5 through 10.¹⁴⁰ On the evening of December 12, Louis James and Marie Wainwright appeared at the Grand Opera House before "a large and well-pleased audience in Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet."¹⁴¹ They were followed the next week by Miss Margaret Mather who "delighted a large audience . . . by the superb rendition of her part" as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet.¹⁴²

With the coming of such outstanding stars as Mr. James and Miss Wainwright, as well as Miss Mather, it is evident that by the middle of this season the city of Fort Smith had clearly become the most important theatre center in the region.

Cora Van Tassill's "famous grand spectacular drama, Hidden Hand was the next event scheduled in Fort Smith, to be given on the night of December 17, 1887.¹⁴³ Following Miss Van Tassill, Frank Wills was scheduled in A Cold Day on the evening of December 20.¹⁴⁴

Rusco and Swift's Standard Uncle Tom's Cabin Company was booked for the evening of December 23.¹⁴⁵ Charles L. Davis was

¹³⁹Fort Smith Elevator, November 25, 1887.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., December 9, 1887.

¹⁴¹Ibid., December 16. 1887.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., December 23, 1887.

scheduled to appear in Alvin Joslyn on the evening of December 27, and Emma Abbott concluded the December bookings on December 30 and 31.¹⁴⁶ The audience was enthusiastic in its praise for Miss Abbott and was reported to be anxiously looking forward "for Miss Abbott's reappearance next season."¹⁴⁷

During January, Kate Bensberg, an opera singer, "put in a good appearance" at the Opera House in Fort Smith.¹⁴⁸

The season continued, and the quality of the companies improved for the most part as the Tribune announced the appearance of Ben Maginley in Inshavogue on January 26,¹⁴⁹ Miaco's production of The Magic Talisman on February 15, and Roland Reed, the comedian, on February 18.¹⁵⁰

Patti Rosa was booked for March 19 and 20 to play Love and Duty and Imp,¹⁵¹ and Fred Warde was to return on March 26 and 27 to perform Galba, The Gladiator and Virginus.¹⁵² James O'Neil was scheduled for the evening of March 28, when he was to appear in The Count of Monte Cristo.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., January 6, 1888.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., January 20, 1888.

¹⁴⁹Daily Fort Smith Tribune, January 22, 1888.

¹⁵⁰Fort Smith Elevator, February 10, 1888.

¹⁵¹Ibid., March 16, 1888.

¹⁵²Ibid., March 23, 1888.

¹⁵³Ibid., March 16, 1888.

Joseph Jefferson was the next attraction, and he came on the evening of April 23. The Fort Smith Elevator makes no mention of him, but the Van Buren Press reports his appearance, although it does not list the plays performed.¹⁵⁴ Kate Putnam was scheduled for the evenings of April 30 and May 1,¹⁵⁵ and the Templeton Comic Opera Company closed the season by presenting Mascott, Girofle-Girofla, and Erminie during the week of June 4.¹⁵⁶

The season of 1887-1888 was a milestone in the history of theatre in the region. The completion of the Opera House made it possible for stars with a national reputation to bring their companies to the city to perform. Joseph Jefferson, James O'Neil, Fred Warde, Louis James, Marie Wainwright, Margaret Mather, and Emma Abbott were among the most famous and popular stars in the American Theatre at this time, and their appearance in Fort Smith allowed the theatre audiences of the whole region to sample the performances of these popular personalities.

Fayetteville. In early September, 1887, the newly completed Wood's Opera House opened in Fayetteville with an amateur production of "the Grecian Mythological comedy, entitled Pygmalion and Galatea."¹⁵⁷ The first professional dramatic company appeared at the

¹⁵⁴Van Buren Press, April 28, 1888. ¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Fort Smith Elevator, April 28, 1888.

¹⁵⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, September 6, 1887.

Opera House in mid-October. The "Operatic extravaganze" entitled Two Old Cronies was given on October 13 to a small audience.¹⁵⁸ This was followed by A Boy Hero starring Martin Hayden. This company made much of the fact that it would bring special scenery complete with mechanical effects.¹⁵⁹

Michael Strogoff, presented by the Charles L. Anderson's Minuet Carnival Company, was on the boards for October 28 and receives warm praise from the Sentinel. "This is decidedly the best play and troupe we had had in our opera house and we hope that the management will soon secure other attractions as excellent as this company."¹⁶⁰

In November Katie Putnam "in her great serio-comic drama, Erma, the Elf" was the next attraction to be promised the theatre-goers in Fayetteville. She was scheduled to appear on November 11.¹⁶¹ That same month, Ezra F. Kendall in A Pair of Kids played to a large audience on the evening of November 15.¹⁶²

Following an engagement in Fort Smith, the Jennie Holman Company came to Fayetteville during the week of December 12. The first play presented was Divorced, and it was well received by a large audience.¹⁶³ Following this, "the Great Musical Comedy, A Cold Day," was

¹⁵⁸Fayetteville Democrat, October 21, 1887.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., October 14, 1887.

¹⁶⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 1, 1887.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Fayetteville Democrat, November 18, 1887.

¹⁶³Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, December 13, 1887.

booked for December 19,¹⁶⁴ and the last play of the year was Uncle Tom's Cabin, scheduled by Rusco and Swift's Standard Uncle Tom's Cabin Company for December 22.¹⁶⁵

The first event of the new year was anticipated as "the great society event of the season." Miss Kate Bensburg and her Opera Company were to be at Wood's Opera House on January 20 in "the first production in this city of Balfe's beautiful opera, 'The Sleeping Queen!'"¹⁶⁶ This was not opera in a pure sense, for an announcement was made that Miss Bensburg would sing "Wastin'," and by special request, "The Last Rose of Summer."¹⁶⁷ The prices were raised to one dollar, but no extra charge was made for reserved seats.

Ben Maginley was booked to star in Inshavogue on January 27 following his appearance in Fort Smith. The advertisement says that the special scenery for this "romantic musical Irish drama, includes an Irish Glen by Moonlight, with Natural Waterfall of Running Water."¹⁶⁸

F. C. Bangs was the next attraction. He played in Francesca da Rimini on the evening of January 31, but while the audience was reported to be appreciative, the size of the audience was not deemed worthy of so "famous" a performer.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., December 20, 1887.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., January 10, 1888. ¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Fayetteville Democrat, January 27, 1888.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

The next event was Miaco's production of The Magic Talisman, scheduled to play on February 14. No report is extant of the performance.¹⁷⁰ A production of Cris and Lena featuring the German dialect comedian, Pete Baker, completed the schedule for the month of February.¹⁷¹

M'ille Rhea starring in Frou Frou came to the opera house on March 5 and was greeted by the largest audience that had ever been in Wood's Opera House. She proved to be a "charming and fascinating actress of the highest order."¹⁷² On March 12, "the great Musical Comedy" entitled Busted was advertised as the next attraction. This production featured Fred Dixon, Miss LeBrun, and a large company of performers.¹⁷³ The director of the band and orchestra for this company was Ed Botefuhr, a former resident of Fayetteville.¹⁷⁴

John Wood succeeded in booking Patti Rosa for one night, March 21, as his next dramatic attraction. Her performance was a great success and was witnessed by a large audience. "She captured the audience and no mistake."¹⁷⁵

Fred Warde appeared next in the advertisements for Wood's Opera House. He was scheduled for the evening of March 28 in Sheridan

¹⁷⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, January 31, 1888.

¹⁷¹Ibid., February 21, 1888.

¹⁷²Fayetteville Democrat, March 2, 1888.

¹⁷³Ibid., March 9, 1888.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., March 23, 1888.

Knowles' Virginus.¹⁷⁶ There are no notices of his performance in the next week's papers, but it is highly likely that he fulfilled the engagement.

As the season drew to a close, Katie Putnam arrived to star in "her beautiful Southern Drama, Lena, the Madcap," on the evening of May 7. Following the performance Miss Putnam presented Mr. Wood with a beautiful goldheaded cane from the citizens of Fayetteville. It was given "as a token of their appreciation of his efforts in securing the best troops [sic] for their pleasure and entertainment."¹⁷⁷

The concluding attraction of the 1887-1888 season was the Templeton Opera Company. It was scheduled to present the Mikado on the evening of June 8, Mascotte as a Saturday matinee, and Olivette on Saturday night.¹⁷⁸

The season had been varied, and the audience response, especially for the more famous stars, had been satisfactory.

The Season of 1888-1889

The theatrical activity in the region increased during the next season. In Fort Smith at least forty-three companies presented standard dramatic entertainment. Fayetteville was visited by seventeen dramatic companies and Van Buren was visited by at least eight.

¹⁷⁶Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, March 27, 1888.

¹⁷⁷Fayetteville Democrat, May 11, 1888.

¹⁷⁸Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, June 5, 1888.

Fort Smith. The 1888-1889 season is the only Fort Smith theatrical season for which there remains an extensive collection of programs. The Carnegie Library in Fort Smith has in its Fort Smith Collection a bound volume of programs for the whole season's offerings at the Grand Opera House. Most of the companies are not mentioned in the Weekly Elevator, so aside from the contents of the programs, little material exists that throws any additional light on the season.

The season opened on October 8 with a four night run by the Little Golden Troupe in which they presented The Martyr, The Little Dutchess, The Gilded Age, and Katti, The Family Help. This was followed by Fowler and Warmington's Company in a production of Skipped by the Light of the Moon, on October 17. Lizzie Evans returned for the next engagement in The Buckeye and Our Angel on October 19 and 20. Nellie McHenry in Three of a Kind and Tutein in Struck Gas on October 24 and October 30 respectively were the last two October attractions.

The month of November saw Jane Coombs in Bleak House on November 6 and Frank M. Wills in Two Old Cronies on November 9. The highlight of the first half of the season was the appearance of Thomas Keene on November 14 and 15. The plays presented by Mr. Keene were Richard III and Julius Caesar. On November 19, Newton Beers appeared in Lost in London, and on November 21 Si Perkins was presented with Frank Jones in the starring role. A performance of Augustin Daly's Night Off on November 29 ended the month.

December was the busiest month of the season. Pete Baker returned and presented The Emigrant on December 1. Only A Country Girl

held the boards on December 5. Prescott and McLean gave three performances in December: on December 7, The Merchant of Venice; Ingomar, at a matinee on December 8; and As You Like It, in the evening of December 8. Mr. and Mrs. Florence were the next attractions and starred in Our Governor on December 12 and The Mighty Dollar on December 13.

During the last half of the month the Jules Grau's Comic Opera Company occupied the stage of the Grand Opera House on December 17, 18, and 19 and presented Black Hussar, Queen's Lace Handkerchief, and Erminie. Following this, four separate companies gave Alone in London on December 20, The Count of Monte Cristo on December 21, Lights and Shadows on December 22, and For Congress and Col. Mulberry Sellers on December 24 and 25 respectively. These five performances were the last in 1888.

A Cold Day opened the new year at the Grand Opera House on the evening of January 7, 1889. Five days later Uncle Tom's Cabin, done by the Boston Ideal Company, filled the stage. Miss Lillian Lewis was the next attraction and appeared in L'Article 47 and As In A Looking Glass on January 14 and 15. Around the World in 80 Days was staged on January 18, and Miss Lewis returned to present Dona Sol on the nineteenth. Effie Ellser in Judge Not on January 22, and Clifton and Holforde in Theodora on January 23, concluded the month.

The highlight of the second half of the season came on the evenings of February 1 and 2, when Madame Fanny Janauschek starred in Meg Merrilies and Macbeth. Janauschek was one of the leading tragediennes on the American stage at this time. Her Lady Macbeth was said to be one of her most impressive characters, and Meg Merrilies was one

of her better known roles.¹⁷⁹ Madam Janauschek unfortunately seems to have had a small audience for both appearances, although her performance was reported to be "first class."¹⁸⁰

In the month of February audiences were entertained by Creston Clarke, J. Z. Little, and William McCready, along with a return engagement of The Magic Talisman.

March witnessed the return of Ezra F. Kendall in A Pair of Kids, John Wild in Running Wild, Clara Morris in Renee De Moran on March 8, Shadows of a Great City on March 18, J. C. Steward in Two Johns on March 21, and Storm Beaten on March 25.

The only performance of a professional dramatic company in April was that of Joseph Jefferson in Cricket on the Hearth and Lend Me Five Shillings toward the end of the month. The Jennie Holman Combination played to full houses during the week of May 23, to end the 1888-1889 season at the Fort Smith Grand Opera House.¹⁸¹

Fayetteville. In late August of 1888 the Arkansas Sentinel published a preview of the second season at Wood's Opera House. The article praises John Wood.

We can congratulate Mr. Wood upon his excellent management, as he has succeeded in giving us entertainments by companies that

¹⁷⁹Oral Sumner Coad and Edwin Mims, Jr., The American Stage (Vol. XIV of The Pageant of America, ed. Ralph Henry Gabriel. 15 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 231.

¹⁸⁰Van Buren Press, February 9, 1889.

¹⁸¹Fort Smith Elevator, May 17, 1889.

rarely ever go outside of large cities. He assures us that his engagements are only the best; no cheap companies have been booked with him, and we look for crowded houses all through the season. The Opera House is worthy of liberal patronage and too much praise cannot be extended to Mr. Wood for his enterprise.¹⁸²

The first attraction of the new season was Eunice Goodrich and her company. They played on the evening of September 10 and 11 in Dad's Boy and Wanted, A Husband. While attendance was only fair, Miss Goodrich left a good impression and the Democrat notes that "Fayetteville will gladly greet her again."¹⁸³

The next professional dramatic show booked by Wood was Lizzie Richmond and W. T. Bryant in Keep It Dark on the evening of October 5.¹⁸⁴ Following this the theatre-goers were offered Fowler and Warmington's production of Skipped by the Light of the Moon on the evening of October 16, but few of them attended the performance.¹⁸⁵

Lizzie Evans was booked next at the Opera House, where the Sentinel announced that on October 18 she would star in "her brilliant new comedy, a quaint picture of Ohio life, in four acts, entitled, 'The Buckeye.'"¹⁸⁶ The report states:

Although there was a small audience present occasioned by outside circumstances, she has nevertheless left behind such a

¹⁸²Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, August 28, 1888.

¹⁸³Fayetteville Democrat, September 14, 1888.

¹⁸⁴Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 2, 1888.

¹⁸⁵Fayetteville Democrat, October 19, 1888.

¹⁸⁶Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, October 16, 1888.

pleasing impression that should she ever visit us again she will be assured of a rousing packed-to-the-wall house. This bright little star of loveliness and radiance, still dances before our vision as brightly and as joyously and as beautifully as the silver ripples of stainless water. Come again, Miss Evans --- You are always welcomed.¹⁸⁷

While in Fayetteville the Lizzie Evans Company hired Damon Clarke, one of the editors of the Fayetteville Republican and the former manager of the Opera House, to fill in as one of the leading characters.¹⁸⁸ He continued on tour and played as far away as Little Rock.¹⁸⁹

Two Old Cronies, the next play planned for the Opera House, was scheduled to be presented on November 8.¹⁹⁰ On November 20, Newton Beers was to appear in Lost in London,¹⁹¹ and on November 28 "the laughing event of the season, A Night Off," was booked.¹⁹²

In December the Sentinel advertised that Aiden Benedict would star in The Count of Monte Cristo on the twentieth.¹⁹³

The new year was begun with a scheduled production of A Cold Day, on January 5, 1889.¹⁹⁴ This was followed by a presentation of As In A Looking Glass starring Miss Lillian Lewis.¹⁹⁵ Her performance of this play is praised by one reviewer:

¹⁸⁷Ibid., October 23, 1888.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., October 30, 1888.

¹⁸⁹Fayetteville Democrat, October 26, 1888.

¹⁹⁰Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, November 6, 1888.

¹⁹¹Ibid., November 13, 1888.

¹⁹²Ibid., November 20, 1888.

¹⁹³Ibid., December 18, 1888.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., January 1, 1889.

¹⁹⁵Fayetteville Democrat, January 18, 1889.

The justly celebrated Lillian Lewis appeared at Wood's Opera House last night and was crowned with our people in garlands of fragrant approbation. She came, she conquered and has scattered, in a measure, the clouds of prejudice, which have darkened the theatrical sky in this locality and the golden sunshine of appreciation is beaming out to her in increasing brilliancy. We saw the mirror of life as it truly and faithfully reflects the emotions and longings that ebb and flow within the human bosom. We saw love bud and blossom out in the heart. We saw wrong dethroned and right triumphant. Miss Lewis is unquestionably a dramatic genius and her "Lena Despart" in "As In A Looking Glass" was one of the grandest performances ever given in Fayetteville.¹⁹⁶

The next night she presented L'Article 7 for the benefit of the fire company.¹⁹⁷

While Miss Lewis was in Fayetteville she offered Damon Clarke, the editor of the Fayetteville Republican, a position as treasurer and assistant manager of her troupe. He was unable to resist the offer, sold his interest in the paper, and went to Hot Springs to join the troupe. The Democrat observes: "Damon says he may count railroad ties on his return home, but his Fayetteville friends expect him to become a star."¹⁹⁸

Following Miss Lewis's performances, Miss Phosa M'Alister, accompanied by Mr. William F. Clifton, was scheduled for "the beautiful historical drama, Theodora."¹⁹⁹

The most famous "star" to appear in Fayetteville during this season came next to the Opera House. Creston Clarke presented Hamlet

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., January 25, 1889.

¹⁹⁹Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, January 23, 1889.

on February 5, but labored under great disadvantages because he was hoarse from a cold.²⁰⁰

The season rapidly drew to a close with only five more productions of legitimate drama. Miaco's Magic Talisman was given on the evening of February 14.²⁰¹ John Wild in Running Wild was booked next for the evening of March 1.²⁰² Belle Emerson in Fun in A Parlor was at the Opera House on March 21, but the company came upon hard times while in the city.²⁰³ Damon Clarke, evidently back from his work with Miss Lillian Lewis, "took the fragments of the 'comedy stars,' put them on wheels and started out over the country."²⁰⁴ Miss Clara Louise Kellog came to Wood's Opera House on May 1 and was welcomed by "the largest audience that has ever greeted any troupe in this city."²⁰⁵ Special trains and theatre parties came from the whole area to hear this famous Prima Donna.²⁰⁶ The season was concluded with a scheduled performance of Miss Nellie Walters in Criss Cross.²⁰⁷

Van Buren. The first theatrical event of the 1888-1889 season in the McKibben Opera House in Van Buren was a performance of

²⁰⁰Fayetteville Democrat, February 8, 1889.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, February 26, 1889.

²⁰³Fayetteville Democrat, April 5, 1889.

²⁰⁴Ibid. ²⁰⁵Ibid., May 1, 1889.

²⁰⁶Ibid., April 26, 1889.

²⁰⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, April 30, 1889.

Si Perkins, starring Mr. Frank Jones, on November 20.²⁰⁸ The next month George and Lizzie May Ulmer appeared in Col. Mulberry Sellers on December 22. The Van Buren Press notes that the audience for this play was very slim, "but the company showed that they could do better with the right kind of audience."²⁰⁹

In January, Irene Worrell visited Van Buren for a three night's engagement, but the audiences still remained small because of the weather.²¹⁰ While in Van Buren, Miss Worrell presented Patty, M'liss, and Little Ferret. The next booking was Miaco's Magic Talisman for the evening of February 12.²¹¹ William McCready advertised to appear in The Black Flag at the McKibben Opera House in February, but no record of the play is given.²¹²

In March John Wild was engaged for Running Wild on the night of March 4.²¹³ Nellie Walters closed the season with a performance of Criss Cross, which was announced to be presented on May 4.²¹⁴

The theatre-goers in Van Buren, to a large extent, depended on the offerings of the Fort Smith Grand Opera House for their

²⁰⁸Van Buren Press, November 17, 1888.

²⁰⁹Ibid., December 29, 1888.

²¹⁰Ibid., January 12, 1889.

²¹¹Ibid., February 9, 1889.

²¹²Ibid., February 16, 1889.

²¹³Ibid., March 2, 1889.

²¹⁴Ibid.

legitimate drama. They might on occasion be selected as a spot to fill in the itinerary of a traveling company, but as a general rule, the major companies did not stop there. The Van Buren Press, however, reported frequently that parties of Van Buren citizens went to Fort Smith to see the most famous stars of the day.

July-December, 1889

The last six months of the year are difficult to reconstruct from available information. In Fort Smith the Elevator only mentions one star scheduled for the Opera House, and that was Thomas Keene in Richelieu on Monday, November 18.²¹⁵

The Van Buren Press furnishes the information that Carrie Radcliffe, supported by the Criterion Dramatic Company, played in Fort Smith during Fair Week in October.²¹⁶

In Fayetteville, John Wood threatened to close the Opera House because of excessive taxes. The county and city taxes, as well as recorder fees, marshal's fees and collecting license for a visiting company amounted to \$14.50.²¹⁷ Because there was little hope for the lifting of these taxes, Wood let the booking season go by and announced to all who inquired that the Opera House was closed "owing to too high license."²¹⁸

²¹⁵Fort Smith Elevator, November 15, 1889.

²¹⁶Van Buren Press, October 5, 1889.

²¹⁷Fayetteville Arkansas Sentinel, July 23, 1889.

²¹⁸Ibid.

In spite of this some companies still came to Fayetteville during that fall. By offering a large advanced ticket sale, Wood was able to schedule Marie Prescott and R. D. MacLean in Othello, on October 29.²¹⁹ This company probably did perform although neither of the papers give them a notice. The only other event announced for the fall was a performance of The Last Days of Pompeii on the evening of November 29.²²⁰ No other dramatic productions were announced for the remaining days of 1889 in Fayetteville.

The one play scheduled for Van Buren during the last half of the year was a performance of The World on September 24 at the Ross Opera House, earlier called the McKibben Opera House.²²¹ Traveling in the company were J. B. Hogan and Mabel Norton, "old favorites with Van Buren theatre-goers, . . .,"²²² but it was greeted by a slim audience because of rain and wind.²²³

Certainly more dramatic companies traveled in the region during this six-month period, but the extant newspapers give them no coverage, leaving a near void in material relative to the theatre.

IV. SUMMARY: 1885-1889

In the early days after the Civil War few legitimate dramatic

²¹⁹Ibid., October 29, 1889.

²²⁰Ibid., November 26, 1889.

²²¹Van Buren Press, September 14, 1889.

²²²Ibid.

²²³Ibid., September 28, 1889.

theatre companies ventured into northwest Arkansas. Following the completion of the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad in the mid-seventies, however, they slowly began to increase in frequency. From 1876 to 1885 the companies which came to the region and performed plays were, for the most part, traveling repertory combinations which would remain in one town for several days, allowing the audiences to see offerings of plays currently popular in the nation. As transportation and communication improved the troupes began to skip the smaller towns and relied on the larger ones for their stops.

During the last half of the 1880's the Grand Opera House was completed in Fort Smith and Wood's Opera House was opened in Fayetteville. Because of these facilities, and because the facilities were in the hands of enterprising managers, Fort Smith and Fayetteville flourished in the late 1880's as popular stops for dramatic companies. During the last few years many of the most famous stars traveling at that time appeared in the region: Joseph Jefferson, Thomas Keene, James O'Neil, Madame Janaushek, Fred Warde, Clara Louise Kellogg, Louis James, Marie Wainwright, and Margaret Mather. Fort Smith was the most frequent stop since it was the largest city in the region, and the stars usually played there, although Fayetteville was also able to attract some of them from time to time.

All in all the theatre-goers of northwest Arkansas had an ample opportunity to taste the theatre fare, which was offered to the rest of the nation at this time.

CHAPTER XIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From the time of the first settlements in the early 1800's to the Civil War, northwest Arkansas was not only a geographical, but also a theatrical frontier. The development of theatrical entertainment paralleled the growth and development of the centers of civilization in the newly settled wilderness, and the types of shows which appeared in the region were circuses, minstrels, amateur dramatic productions, various amusements and entertainments, and the professional legitimate theatre.

A circus was the earliest form of theatrical amusement which penetrated the frontier in northwest Arkansas before the Civil War. W. Waterman's Circus appeared in the middle Arkansas River Valley in 1838. Ten years later the Rockwell and Company's Equestrian Circus, the second one to appear, entered the region. In 1851 Mabie Brother's Circus came to the Arkansas River Valley. The most active period of circus visits was in 1858-1859, when at least five circuses toured or advertised to tour through the region. Circuses were rare occurrences during most of the frontier history of the area and almost always met with success among the curious settlers.

The earliest professional minstrel troupe in northwest Arkansas was the Ethiopian Serenaders who were in Van Buren and

probably in Fort Smith in 1845. This group stimulated the first amateur minstrel performance in the region soon after its appearance that year. In 1857 the steamer Banjo made its first trip into the area with Ned Davis' Minstrel Troupe aboard, and the little boat returned the following year with another troupe of minstrel performers. There were other performances and other companies which advertised, but no record of their coming remains. The minstrel entertainments before the Civil War were not excessive in number, but the few which did come were received favorably.

Amateur dramatic activity was also not extensive before the war. The first reported amateur performances were in Fort Smith and Van Buren in the early 1840's. These did not spawn any further amateur efforts for the next few years, and the only other amateur events before the early 1860's were in the schools of the region. The final amateur activity was associated with Nick Moroney's theatre in Fort Smith in 1861. The amateurs were always supported by the press and populace, and contributed to the social and cultural beginnings of this section of the state.

The professional amusements and entertainments which appeared in the region before the war were very limited. An occasional lecturer and at least one magician came, as well as a violinist and perhaps a burlesque opera troupe. These events were scattered, and no information was found which would indicate that they were commonplace during this time.

The professional dramatic entertainments in the region before

the Civil War were also infrequent, and only nine companies visited northwest Arkansas from 1840 through 1862. The first professional company came up the river from Little Rock in 1840. The most active period of professional dramatic entertainment prior to the Civil War was during the late 1850's and early 1860's, when Nick Moroney's theatre was operating in Fort Smith and Van Buren. This activity spawned other companies and performances in Fayetteville and Greenwood. None of the actors who appeared in these towns prior to the war were nationally significant. A region as remote as northwest Arkansas was a backwater to the more famous stars who appeared in the western theatres.

The significance of the pre-war period is that the theatrical entertainments which occurred were successful attempts to introduce to the frontier the institutions of civilization which the new settlers had left behind in the older areas of the East. A second significant observation is that theatrical entertainments were generally welcomed by the natives of the region, and, with the exception of an occasional critical word about circuses, they were also welcomed by the press.

In the early years immediately following the Civil War, theatrical entertainments were still infrequent. Following the completion of the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad in the 1870's there was a gradual and steady increase in all types of amusements. The greatest period of growth in the area of professional shows was during the 1880's. This was prompted by several factors: the region became more accessible, the population increased, the theatre facilities were improved, and more

professional companies were available.

Circuses, which had provided only occasional amusement during the years before the Civil War, became annual events in most of the towns for a brief period in the 1870's and early 1880's. The development of railroad shows cut this period short, for once the circuses could travel rapidly, the smaller towns were frequently skipped in favor of the larger, more prosperous towns. The circuses which appeared during the twenty-five years following the war included Dan Rice's Showboat, the Damsel, Van Amburgh's Circus, W. W. Cole's Circuses, John B. Doris Circus, Barnum and Bailey's Circus and many other shows of various size and reputation.

After the war opposition to the circuses arose because their appearances drained cash from the communities, and the circus people often employed dishonest practices to "bilk" the ignorant local people. Nonetheless the circus remained popular with the audiences of the region from the first appearance of W. Waterman's Circus in 1838 to the last appearance of a circus in October, 1889. During this time the region was visited by at least thirty-three circuses, and many more advertised to appear and likely did so, even though no extant reports of the performances remain.

Professional minstrel entertainments became increasingly common following the Civil War. At least twenty-five professional companies, possibly more, visited the region during this period. Also some infrequent amateur efforts at minstrel shows were made. The reception tendered minstrel troupes was generally good, although a few of

the companies came under criticism upon some occasions. From the first performance of the New York Ethiopian Serenaders in 1845, to the coming of the Wilson Minstrels in 1889, the audiences of northwest Arkansas had ample opportunity to see and enjoy one of the most popular forms of entertainment in nineteenth century America.

During the early postwar period amateur activity flourished, but the increase in professional troupes in the region in the 1880's resulted in a decrease in the number of efforts by the amateurs. Amateur groups were active in Fort Smith, Van Buren, Russellville, Dardanelle, and Fayetteville. The work of these amateur thespians was well received by the press and the public, and they were usually encouraged to give more frequent performances. The significance of these groups lies in the fact that they felt the need for theatrical entertainments and set about to fill it. Through satisfying this need they offered recreation to the participants, as well as many hours of amusement for the audiences of northwest Arkansas.

Other forms of theatrical entertainments which appeared in the area were musical variety shows, magicians, ventriloquists, lecturers, elocutionists, medicine shows and other varied amusements. While the most popular were the musical variety shows, the other forms were not uncommon and were usually well attended. Some of the magicians and other entertainers were criticized because they gave unsatisfactory performances or failed to please the audiences; however, the miscellaneous entertainments were usually well received.

The most important development in professional theatrical

entertainments was in the increase of dramatic companies visiting the region. The early postwar years saw few dramatic troupes come, but this condition was changed toward the end of the 1870's when companies began to appear on a more regular basis. The greatest period of growth for professional dramatic companies was in the 1880's. The completion of the Academy of Music in Fort Smith in 1883 afforded the best theatre facilities in the region up to this time, and a manager was engaged to book shows on a regular basis. In 1887 both the Grand Opera House in Fort Smith and the Wood's Opera House in Fayetteville were completed, and these two towns became the theatrical centers of northwest Arkansas. During the last years of the 1880's the larger towns of the region were visited by some of the most popular stars of the American stage at that time: Joseph Jefferson, Thomas Keene, James O'Neil, Madame Janaushek, Fred Warde, Clara Louise Kellogg, Louis James, and Marie Wainwright. With few exceptions all of these stars were accorded a good reception by the audiences of the towns where they appeared. The period could well be labeled the "Golden Age" of the Fort Smith and Fayetteville Theatres, for these two towns furnished the citizens of the area with some of the best dramatic entertainment available in the United States at that time.

Northwest Arkansas was not important as a theatre center when compared to the eastern cities. Nonetheless the development of theatrical entertainments in a region such as this is significant in that it shows that the citizens found the theatre and theatrical entertainments a necessary part of their lives. In the early days of the region the

average theatre-goer was offered little variety in his theatrical fare. He discovered in the later years that there were good and bad shows and because of the large variety offered him, he was able to exercise a choice in the type of entertainment which he attended. The theatrical developments in the region not only reflected the desire of the citizens for contact with the culture and traditions of the eastern part of the United States, but also reflected the need which the theatre satisfied in the everyday life of the communities and the citizens.

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A P P E N D I X E S

APPENDIX A

A LISTING OF CIRCUSES: 1838-1889

The circuses listed here are those that reportedly appeared in the region. A question mark following the names of some of the shows indicates some doubt exists about their actual appearance. The list includes only those towns and dates that appeared in the circus advertisements or were indicated in other evidence as being in the route of the circus. Only those years in which circuses appeared are included.

PART I: 1817-1864

- 1838 W. Waterman and Company's Circus: Clarksville, Sept. 24; St. Martins, Sept. 25; Dardanelle, Sept. 26.
- 1848 Rockwell and Company's Equestrian Circus: Van Buren, Oct. 21-23; Fort Smith, Oct. 24-25.
- 1851 Mabie Brother's Circus: Fort Smith, Dec. 5; Ozark, Dec. 8; Clarksville, Dec. 9; Dover, Dec. 10; Norristown, Dec. 11; Lewisburg, Dec. 12.
- 1858 G. N. Eldred's Great Rotunda Circus and Menagerie: Clarksville, Oct. 18; Dover, Oct. 19; Potts, Oct. 20.
- Signor Donetti's Monkey Circus aboard the Steamer Banjo:
Dardanelle, Dec. 24; Fort Smith, Dec. 26-27; Van Buren, Dec. 28-29; Ozark, Dec. 30.
- 1859 Mabie's Menagerie and Circus: Fort Smith, May 16; Evansville, May 19; Boonsboro, May 20; Fayetteville, May 21.
- The Caribow and the Great Southern Menagerie: Fort Smith, May 17; Fayetteville, May 23.

Rivers and Derious Dramatic Company (?): Fayetteville, Sept. 1-2; Evansville, Sept. 5; Natural Dam, Sept. 6; Van Buren, Sept. 7-8; Fort Smith, Sept. 9-10; Mulberry, Sept. 12; Ozark, Sept. 13.

PART II: 1865-1889

1867 Lake's Hippolympiad and Mammouth Circus (?): Fort Smith, Oct. 21-22; Van Buren, Oct. 23.

1870 Orton Brother's Great Southern Circus: Fort Smith, Apr. 7-8; Fayetteville, Apr. ?.

Hemings, Cooper, and Whitby Great Circus and Menagerie: Fayetteville, Sept. 22; Fort Smith, Sept. 26-27.

1872 James E. Cooper, Grand Consolidated Menagerie, Museum and Circus: Fayetteville, Oct. 17; Fort Smith, Oct. 21-22; Van Buren, Oct. 23.

1874 Dan Rice's Circus Boat, The Damsel: Van Buren, Mar. 28; Fort Smith, Mar. 30-31; Roseville, Apr. 1.

1875 Cooper, Bailey Circus: Dardanelle, Nov. 29; Russellville, Nov. 30.

1876 Dan Rice's Trained Animal Show: Dardanelle, Mar. 18; Russellville, Mar. ?.

W. W. Cole's Great New York and New Orleans Zoological and Equestrian Exposition: Russellville, Nov. 1; Van Buren, Nov. 4.

1877 Van Amburgh and Company New Great Golden Menagerie Circus and Colosseum: Bentonville, Nov. 16; Fayetteville, Nov. 17; Alma, no show, Nov. 19; Van Buren, no show, Nov. 20; Fort Smith, Nov. 21-22; Ozark, by rail, Nov. 23; Clarksville, by rail, Nov. 24; Russellville, by rail, Nov. 26.

Professor DeVerdie, Mrs. DeVerdie and Professor Eldridge, Gymnast, Contortionists and Physical mediums, tight rope performers as well as the flying trapeze: Fort Smith, Aug. 6-15.

1878 Dan Rice's Show Boat, The Damsel: Dardanelle, Mar. 4; Fort Smith, Mar. 11; Van Buren, Mar. 12.

Ed. T. Basye's Circus: Fayetteville, Nov. 18; Van Buren, Nov. 22; Fort Smith, Nov. 23.

1880 Dutton's Great Southern Circus: Russellville, July 2; Van Buren, July 10; Fort Smith, July 12; Fayetteville, July 17.

Cooper and Jackson's Great European Circus: Bloomfield, Sept. 23; Bentonville, Sept. 24; Fayetteville, Sept. 25; Sept. 26, Sunday; Mountainburg, Sept. 27; Alma, Sept. 28; Van Buren, Sept. 29; Fort Smith, Sept. 30; Greenwood, Oct. 1; Charleston, Oct. 2; Oct. 3, Sunday; Paris, Oct. 4; Roseville, Oct. 5; Ozark, Oct. 6; Clarksville, Oct. 7; Russellville, Oct. 8; Dardanelle, Oct. 9; Oct. 10, Sunday; Atkins, Oct. 11; Morrilton, Oct. 12.

1881 S. H. Barrett and Company's Circus (?): Fayetteville, Oct. 22.

1882 The Great Parisian Circus: Fort Smith, May 4-5.

Cooper, Jackson and Company's Circus: Dardanelle, Nov. 8; Russellville, Nov. 9; Fort Smith, Nov. 15.

W. W. Cole's Circus, Theatre and Menagerie: Van Buren, Nov. 18; Russellville, Nov. 21.

The New York Show: Van Buren, Nov. 1-4; Russellville, Nov. 13-14; Dardanelle, Nov. 15-30.

1883 W. W. Cole's New Collosal Shows (?): Fayetteville, May 3; Fort Smith, May 4.

Main and Company Circus: Van Buren, Oct. 9; Fort Smith, Oct. 10; Russellville, Oct. 17.

1884 John B. Doris's New Monster Shows: Fayetteville, April 25; Fort Smith, April 26.

Sells Brother's Circus: Fayetteville, Sept. 27; Fort Smith, Sept. 28; Van Buren, Sept. 30; Russellville, Oct. 2.

1885 John B. Doris Great Inter-Ocean Circus (?): Russellville, Nov. 11; Fort Smith, Nov. 14; Van Buren, Nov. 16.

1886 W. W. Cole's New Colossal Shows: Fort Smith, Oct. 12; Russellville, Oct. 13.

Sells Brother's Circus: Fort Smith, Nov. 8.

1887 Spaulding's Great Southern Circus (?): Van Buren, Apr. 18-19;
Fayetteville, Apr. 20-21.

George W. DeHaven's Grand Cheap Show: Van Buren, Sept. 21; Fort
Smith, Sept. 23-24.

S. H. Barrett's New United Monster Shows: Fayetteville, Oct. 19;
Fort Smith, Oct. 20; Russellville, Oct. 21.

1888 Howe's New London Railroad Show (?): Russellville, Apr. 9.

Barnum and Bailey New United Shows: Fayetteville, Sept. 26;
Russellville and Fort Smith, Sept. 28.

1889 French's Railroad Shows, Hippodrome and Menagerie: Fayetteville,
Oct. 5; Russellville, Oct. 10.

APPENDIX B

A CALENDAR OF PROFESSIONAL MINSTREL PERFORMANCES: 1845-1889

The minstrel troupes and performances listed here are those that were reported to have appeared or advertised to appear in the region. If there is any question about the actual appearance a question mark in parenthesis follows the date. Only those years in which performances occurred are included. If the exact dates are not clear, either the month alone is included or, if known, the earliest date is included and followed by the plus (+) sign to indicate that the exact length of the company's stay is not known.

PART I: 1817-1864

1845 The New York Ethiopian Serenaders: Van Buren, May 5-11; Fort Smith, May 13 +.

1857 Sable Minstrels: Van Buren, Apr. 10.

Ned Davis' Minstrel Troupe, on board the Banjo: Van Buren, Apr. 29.

1858 Wright and Bingham's Negro Minstrels: Van Buren, Apr. 16-17 (?).

The National Minstrels: Van Buren, Apr. 19 (?).

Banjo Minstrel Troupe, on board the Banjo: Fort Smith, Dec. 27-28.

PART II: 1865-1889

1867 Empire Minstrels: Fort Smith, Apr. 2-9.

1868 U. S. Minstrels: Fort Smith, Jan. 8-11.

- 1870 Southern Minstrels: Fayetteville, Mar. 7-12; Van Buren, mid-March; Fort Smith, Mar. 20-29.
- Hamilton's Minstrels: Fayetteville, May 18-19.
- 1871 The California Minstrels: Fayetteville, Nov. 10-11; Fort Smith, Nov. 14-25.
- 1874 Captain Strayer's Minstrels: Fayetteville, Apr. 3.
- 1878 Minstrel of unknown name: Van Buren, Nov. 6.
- 1880 Cooper and Jackson Circus Minstrel Troupe: Sept. 23-Oct. 12.
(See appendix A for complete route.)
- Lone Star (Texas Star) Minstrel Company: Van Buren, Oct. 11-12; Fort Smith, Oct. 15-Nov. 6.
- 1883 The Mammoth Callender Negro Minstrels: Van Buren, Nov. 3; Fort Smith, Nov. 5-6.
- 1884 Heywood's New York Mastodons: Fayetteville, Feb. 4; Van Buren, Feb. 5; Fort Smith, Feb. 6; Russellville, Feb. 9.
- Brown's Consolidated Minstrels: Fort Smith, Mar. 5; Fayetteville, Mar. 12 (?).
- Barlow and Wilson and Company Minstrels: Fort Smith, Nov. 1 (?).
- Callender's Minstrels: Fort Smith, Dec. 4.
- 1885 O'Brien Southern Concert and Minstrel Troupe: Fayetteville, May 25-27.
- Heywood's Minstrels: Fayetteville, Oct. 5; Van Buren, Oct. 6.
- 1886 The Little Rock Dude Minstrels: Russellville, Feb. 6; Van Buren, Feb. 15.
- The Baird Minstrels: Van Buren, Mar. 30.
- 1887 Heywood's Minstrels: Fayetteville, Oct. 3; Van Buren, Oct. 4 (?); Russellville, Oct. 7; Dardanelle, Oct. 8.
- 1888 Haverley's Mastodons: Fayetteville, Jan. 7 (?).
- Richards and Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels: Bentonville, Sept. 13; Fayetteville, Sept. 14; Fort Smith, Sept. 15.

Wilson's Minstrels: Fort Smith, Nov. 8.

Gorton's Famous New Orleans Minstrels: Van Buren, Dec. 5;
Fayetteville, Dec. 8.

The Famous Goodyear, Cooke and Dillon's Minstrels: Fort Smith,
Dec. 15.

1889 Wilson Minstrels: Fort Smith, Feb. 25; Fayetteville, Feb. 26;
Fort Smith, Nov. 11 (?).

APPENDIX C

A CALENDAR OF PROFESSIONAL AMUSEMENTS AND ENTERTAINMENTS:

1849-1889

The amusements and entertainments listed in this appendix are those that were reported to have appeared or advertised to appear in the region. If there is any question about the actual appearance a question mark in parenthesis follows the date. Only those years in which performances occurred are included. If the exact dates are not clear, either the month alone is included or, if known, the earliest date is included and followed by the plus (+) sign to indicate that the exact length of the company's stay is not known.

PART I: 1849-1864

1849 Prof. J. N. Maffitt, lecturer: Van Buren, Feb.

Learned Pig: Fayetteville, July; Van Buren, Aug.

Prof. J. Anton, phrenology lecturer: Van Buren, Nov.

1851 Mr. Dalton, magician: Fort Smith, Mar.

1859 Fitzgibbon's Burlesque Opera Troupe, musical variety: Fort Smith, Aug. 18-20 (?).

1860 Alf Howard, Violinist: Fort Smith, Feb. 2.

Ericsson and Hydrogen Balloon Company: Fort Smith, Mar. 16.

PART II: 1865-1889

- 1865 Capt. Adam's Panorama of War Scenes: Van Buren, May 4 (?).
Dr. Beale's Panorama: Fort Smith, Sept. 3-9.
Osage Indian Dancers: Fort Smith, Sept. 19.
- 1866 Artemus Ward, lecturer: Fort Smith, Jan. (?).
- 1867 The Dixies, musical variety: Fort Smith, March 19 +.
Welch and Orr's Varieties: Fort Smith, April 13 +.
Madame Louise Payne Wray, singer: Fort Smith, June 8 (?).
Prof. Steiner, balloon ascension: Fort Smith, Sept. 10.
- 1868 Prof. Paul Graham, elocutionist: Fayetteville, Aug. 29 (?).
Prof. Delay, magician: Fayetteville, Sept. 19 (?).
- 1869 A. T. Shattuck and Company, musical variety: Fayetteville, Nov. 26-27.
Smith Bell Ringers: Fayetteville, Dec. 21; Fort Smith, Dec. 28-30.
- 1870 Prof. A. Ryan and Rolla Ryan, elocutionists: Fort Smith, June 28-July 2.
Organ Grinder: Fort Smith, Oct. 20 +.
Prof. Dunham, magician: Fayetteville, Dec. 1.
- 1871 New Orleans Gaité Comique Troupe, musical variety: Fort Smith, May 22-27; Fayetteville, June 2-3.
Michael Johnson, champion walker: Fort Smith, Dec. 7.
- 1872 Prof. Wells, magician: Fayetteville, Jan. 2-3.
Smith's Bell Ringers: Fayetteville, Jan. 8-9; Fort Smith, Jan. 15-16.
Prof. Sands, magician: Fort Smith, Mar. 4 +.
- 1873 The Davis Family, musical variety: Fort Smith, Jan. 6-11.

- Prof. John Kelly, violinist: Fort Smith, June 30.
- 1874 Davis Family Troupe, musical variety: Fayetteville, Feb. 9 +.
- Prof. E. C. Taylor, magician: Fort Smith, Aug. 17-22.
- Prof. Gershom, magician: Fort Smith, Nov. 30.
- Howard, magician: Van Buren, Dec. 2-3 (?).
- 1875 Prof. A. Ryan and Rolla Ryan, elocutionists: Fort Smith, Nov. 10.
- Prof. Frederick, magician: Dardanelle, Dec. 25 +.
- 1876 Peak Family Bell Ringers: Fort Smith, Jan. 18-20.
- Frederick, magician: Fort Smith, Jan. 21-22.
- 1877 Lillian Rozell Messenger, elocutionist: Fayetteville, Nov. 4.
- 1878 Lillian Rozell Messenger, elocutionist: Fort Smith, Jan. 1.
- New York and New Orleans Olio Comedy Troupe, musical variety: Russellville, Jan. 4-5; Fort Smith, Jan. 19-26; Van Buren, Jan. 27; Fayetteville, Jan. 31-Feb. 1.
- Blaisdell Brothers and McAvoy Swiss Bell Ringers: Fort Smith, Jan. 28-30; Dardanelle, Feb. 1.
- Rev. James L. Denton, lecturer: Fort Smith, Feb. 26-27.
- Dr. Trotter, lecturer: Fort Smith, Mar. 12-13.
- 1879 Punch and Judy Show: Fort Smith, Feb. 14-15.
- Wizard Oil Company, medicine show: Dardanelle, May 28-31; Fort Smith, June 2-15.
- Coleman Sisters, musical variety: Russellville, Oct. 20; Fort Smith, Oct. 25-27; Van Buren, Oct. 29-30.
- Madame Louis, lecturer: Fort Smith, Oct. 27-28.
- Wire Walker, medicine show: Russellville, Dec. 29.
- 1880 Blind Tom, pianist: Fort Smith, Mar. 19-20; Van Buren, Mar.

Fay Hempstead, elocutionist: Fort Smith, Aug. 18-19; Van Buren, Aug. 21; Dardanelle, Aug. 26.

Prof. J. N. Clark, lecturer: Fayetteville, Dec. 1.

1881 Sanders Stereopticon Show: Russellville, Jan. 27.

Prof. W. T. Foster, science lecturer: Russellville, Mar.

Fay Hempstead, elocutionist: Fort Smith, Apr. 27-28; Van Buren, Apr. 30; Dardanelle, May 2-3.

1882 Wadsworth Merry Makers, musical variety: Dardanelle, Jan. 14-16; Van Buren, Jan. 21.

Prof. Hammill and daughter, elocutionists: Russellville, Feb. 6.

Street ventriloquist: Dardanelle, Mar. 5.

Blind Tom, pianist: Ozark, Mar. 23; Fort Smith, Mar. 24-25.

Miller Brothers, spiritual mediums: Van Buren, Apr. 5.

1883 Wilson and O'Neal Variety Theatre: Fort Smith, Mar. 16 +.

The Arlington Company, musical variety: Fayetteville, May 22.

Prof. Landlis, magician: Fayetteville, July 20.

Prof. Hart, magician: Dardanelle, Oct. 4-6.

The Royal Marionettes: Fayetteville, Oct. 19-20; Fort Smith, Oct. 22-23.

1884 Weber Illusion and Comedy Company: Fort Smith, Feb. 28-29.

Andress Carnival of Novelties: Fort Smith, Apr. 1-6; Van Buren, Apr. 18-21.

Wizard Oil Troupe, medicine show: Dardanelle, May 1-3; Fort Smith, June 12-23.

Indian Stage Robbery: Fort Smith, Oct. 14-18.

Pawnee Indian Dances: Fort Smith, Oct. 20.

1885 Prof. McAllister, magician: Fort Smith, Jan. 13-14; Russellville, Feb. 2 (?).

- 1886 Lydia G. Jager's Female Mastodons: Fort Smith, Jan. 26.
Humoristic Show: Fort Smith, Feb. 7.
Davenport Brothers, medicine show: Van Buren, Feb. 21-Mar. 2.
Rolla Ryan, character actor: Fayetteville, Oct. 15-18.
- 1887 Fitzgerald's Troubadors, musical variety: Fayetteville, Sept. 12-17.
Panorama of "Paradise Lost" and Jubilee Singers: Fayetteville, Sept. 23.
Oakes' Merry Makers and Bell Ringers and Crystal Chimes Company: Fayetteville, Oct. 29.
David M. Brewer, elocutionist: Fayetteville, Nov. 22.
- 1888 Prof. Vought, character reader: Van Buren, Jan. 3.
Salisbury Troubadors, musical variety: Fort Smith, Jan. 28 (?).
Hallen and Hart's First Prize Ideals: Fayetteville, Feb. 28.
Eli Perkins, lecturer: Bentonville, Apr. 8-9; Fayetteville, Apr. 10.
Smith's Bell Ringers and Comic Concert Co.: Fayetteville, Apr. 12.
The Great Levy Combination, musical variety: Fort Smith, Apr. 16; Fayetteville, Apr. 17.
The Steens, spiritual mediums: Russellville, Apr. 19-20.
Andress Carnival of Novelties: Russellville, June 5 (?).
Miss Mattie Lee Price, The Georgia Magnetic-electric Girl: Russellville, June 11 +.
Lilly Clay's Burlesque Company: Fort Smith, Nov. 23.
Royce and Lansing Comedy Company, musical variety: Bentonville, Dec. 28; Fayetteville, Dec. 29; Van Buren, Dec. 31.
- 1889 Royce and Lansing Comedy Company, musical variety: Russellville, Jan. 3.

Blind Amos, musical performer: Fort Smith, Feb.

Elliott's Jolly Voyagers, musical variety: Van Buren, Mar. 1-2;
Fayetteville, Apr. 3.

Mr. and Mrs. John R. Scott, monologists: Fayetteville, Apr. 5.

Mrs. Letitia Watkins, lecturer: Fayetteville, Apr. 12.(?).

Lady Venetian Troubadours, and Lady Mandolin Orchestra:
Fayetteville, Aug. 29 (?).

Lilly Clay and Her Blondes: Fort Smith, Sept. 24.

Dr. Hunter's Concert Troupe, medicine show: Russellville, Dec.

APPENDIX D

A CALENDAR OF PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC COMPANIES: 1840-1889

The companies which are included in this appendix are those that were reported to have appeared or advertised to appear in the region between 1840 and 1889. If there is any question about the actual appearance of the company a question mark in parenthesis follows the date. Only those years in which performances occurred are included. If the exact dates are not clear, either the month alone is included or, if known, the earliest date is included and followed by the plus (+) sign to indicate that the exact length of the company's stay is not known. The appendix includes the name of the plays that are known to have been performed and the dates of performance.

PART I: 1840-1864

1840

The first theatre company in the region, c. Mar.-Apr., likely played in Fort Smith. The names of the plays are not extant.

1841

Mr. and Mrs. Newton and Company.

Fayetteville, late Mar.-early Apr.: Day After the Wedding, and
Road to Bali, Apr. 3.

1843

The Dykes.

Van Buren, July.

1858

Mr. and Mrs. Scott's Theatre.
Fort Smith, Dec.

1859

Nick Moroney's Company.

Fort Smith, c. April-July 21: Lucretia Borgia, May 3; The Soldier's Daughter and A Day After the Fair, May 13; Fort Smith 100 Years Hence, c. June 14; Bombastes Furioso, June 16; The Serious Family, June 23; Hamlet, June 27; Lady of Lyons and Dead Shot, June 30; Our Nan or The Good For Nothing, Blackeyed Susan, and Love in Humble Life, July 14; Ingomar, The Barbarian and Pleasant Neighbors, July 21.

Palmer's Variety Theatre.

Fort Smith, May-June.
Van Buren, June.

Nick Moroney's Company changed to Huntley and Mulholland's Company during this stay in Van Buren.

Van Buren, July 23-Aug. 13: Ingomar, The Barbarian, July 23; Fazio, July 25; His Last Legs and Temptation, July 29; Blackeyed Susan, Aug. 1; The Old Guard of Napoleon, Aug. 3; Toodles and Loan of a Lover, Aug. 6; The Serious Family and Paddy Miles Boy, Aug. 10.

Huntley and Mulholland Company.

Greenwood, Aug. 15-21: Omnibus, Aug. 18.

Fitzgibbon's Burlesque Opera Troupe.

Fort Smith, Aug. 18-20 (?).

Huntley and Mulholland Company (contd.).

Van Buren, Sept. 3-16.

Fayetteville, Sept. 17-Oct. 2: Our Nan and Blackeyed Susan, Sept. 17; Toodles, Sept. 20; Spectre Bridegroom and The Irish Lion, Oct. 1; Maid of the Milking Pail and Born to Good Luck, Oct. 2.

Huntley and Mulholland's Company (contd.).

Fayetteville, Oct. 15-28: The Lottery Ticket, Oct. 18.
Van Buren, Nov. 1-10.

Nick Moroney's Theatre.

Fort Smith, Nov. 4-Dec. 21: Pizzario and Rendezvous, Nov. 17; The Hunchback, Nov. 18; The Old Guard of Napoleon and Naval Engagement, Nov. 24; Romeo and Juliet and Toodles, Dec. 1; Macbeth and Widow's Victim, Dec. 3.

1860

Nick Moroney's Theatre (contd.).

Fort Smith, Jan. 1-Feb.

Greenwood, c. Feb. 23.

Fort Smith, Apr. 21 +.

1861

Nick Moroney's Theatre.Fort Smith, June +: All Hail to the Stars and Bars or Ho! Ye Dixie Boys, June 20.

PART II: 1865-1889

1866

Hunter's Opera Troupe.Fort Smith, Sept. 20-Oct. 5: Conjugal Lesson, Sept. 20; Rough Diamond and Masquerade Ball, Sept. 29; Poacher's Doom and Hole in the Wall, Oct. 4; Momentous Question, Oct. 5.

1868

Murray and Loder's Legitimate Dramatic Entertainment.

Fort Smith, Dec. 25 + (?).

1869

Miss Charlotte Crampton's Theatrical Troupe.

Fort Smith, Oct. 23 +.

1870

The Baily Troupe.

Fort Smith, August 22-27.

1876

Selden Irwin Combination.

Van Buren, Apr.

Fort Smith, Apr. 19-29: Benicia Boy and Our American Cousin, Apr. 19; Toby the Conjuror and Solon Shingle, Apr. 20; The Hidden Hand, Apr. 21; The Two Orphans, Apr. 22; Rip Van Winkle, Apr. 26; The Two Orphans, (matinee) Apr. 29; The Big Bonanza, Apr. 29.

Globe Dramatic Company.

Van Buren, Dec. 4-9: Widowed Wife, Dec. 4.

Fort Smith, Dec. 11-23: Rose Cottage, Dec. 11; Man and Wife, Dec. 12; Flirtation or Love at Long Branch, Dec. 13.

1877

Globe Dramatic Company.

Fayetteville, Jan. 3-6: Fanchon the Cricket, Jan. 3; Rose Cottage, Jan. 4; Ticket of Leave Man, Jan. 5; Flirtation, or Love at Long Branch, Jan. 6.

Fayetteville, Nov. 5-10: Lucretia Borgia and The Quiet Family, Nov. 5; Oliver Twist, Nov. 6; Taming a Tartar and Patchwork, Nov. 7; The Hidden Hand, Nov. 8; Fanchon, The Cricket, Nov. 9; Rip Van Winkle, Nov. 10.

Russellville, Dec. 5-8, 13-15: Rose Cottage, Dec. 5; Fanchon, The Cricket, Dec. 6; The Hidden Hand, Dec. 7; Rip Van Winkle, Dec. 8; Lucretia Borgia, Dec. 13.

Dardanelle, Dec. 17-20.

1878

Stoddart Comedy Company.

Fort Smith, Jan. 3-6 (?).

MacFarland Parlor Dramatic Troupe.

Fort Smith, Mar. 15-18.

Van Buren, Mar. 25 +.

1880

The Globe Dramatic Troupe.

Russellville, Apr. 12-14: The Rose of Killarney, Apr. 12; Camille, Apr. 13; East Lynne, Apr. 14.

Dardanelle, Apr. 15-20: The Rose of Killarney and Joshua Whitcomb, Apr. 16; Camille, Apr. 17.

Russellville, Apr. 21-22: Lady Audley's Secret, Apr. 21; Lady of Lyons, Apr. 15.

Mabel Norton Combination.

Russellville, Dec. 16-19: The Phoenix, Dec. 16.

Dardanelle, Dec. 20-25: The Phoenix, Dec. 20; Davy Crockett, Dec. 21; Flirtation, Dec. 22; Under the Gaslight, Dec. 23; Black Diamonds, Dec. 24; The Marble Heart, Dec. 25.

Fort Smith, Dec. 27-Jan. 8, 1881: The Phoenix, Dec. 27; Davy Crockett, and Fool of the Family, Dec. 28; Under the Gas Light, Dec. 29.

1881

Mabel Norton Combination (contd.).

Fort Smith, (contd.), The Phoenix, Jan. 3; Enoch Arden, Jan. 4;
Marble Heart, Jan. 5.
 Van Buren, Jan. 10-14: The Phoenix, Jan. 10; Davy Crockett, Jan.
 Jan. 11; Man of Mystery, Jan. 12; Enoch Arden, Jan. 13.
 Fayetteville, Jan. 17 +: The Phoenix, Jan. 17.
 Dardanelle, Apr. 28-30: Enoch Arden, Apr. 28; Galley Slave, Apr.
 29; Rose of Killarney, (matinee) Apr. 30; Rosedale, Apr. 30.
 Van Buren, c. May 6-7: Rosedale Cottage, May. 6.

Mabel Norton Combination (contd.).

Fort Smith, May 9-17: Rosedale, May 9; Joshua Whitcomb, May 10;
The Octoroon, May 11; Ten Nights in a Bar Room, May 12; Streets
 of New York, May 13; Joshua Whitcomb, (matinee) May 14.
 Van Buren, May 19: Joshua Whitcomb, May 19.
 Russellville, May 27-29: Rosedale, May 27; The Rose of Killarney,
 (matinee) May 28; The Octoroon, May 28.

The J. G. Stutz Mamouth Star Company.

Dardanelle, May 16-23: A Celebrated Case, May 16; Lucretia Borgia,
 May 17; Fanchon, The Cricket, May 18; Lady of Lyons, May 19;
Hamlet, May 20; A Celebrated Case, (matinee) May 21; Rip Van
 Winkle, May 21; The Two Orphans, May 23.
 Russellville, May 24-25: A Celebrated Case, May 24; Hamlet, May 25.
 Fayetteville, July 16-21: Lucretia Borgia, July 16; Fanchon, The
 Cricket, July 17; Rip Van Winkle, July 21.

1882

Mabel Norton Combination.

Fort Smith, Aug. 30-Sept. 6: Divorced or Rose Cottage, Aug. 30;
Colonel Mulberry Sellers, Aug. 31; East Lynne, Sept. 1; Ten
 Nights in a Bar Room; Sept. 2; The Octoroon, Sept. 4; Joshua
 Whitcomb, Sept. 5; Hazel Kirke, Sept. 6.
 Dardanelle, Sept. 12-14.
 Russellville, Sept. 15-16: Hazel Kirke, Sept. 15; Colonel Mulberry
 Sellers, Sept. 16.

Globe Dramatic Company.

Fayetteville, Nov. 5-13: Ticket of Leave Man, Nov. 5; Kathleen
 Mavourneen, Nov. 6; Rose Cottage, Nov. 7; The Hidden Hand, Nov.
 8; Sea of Ice, Nov. 9; Uncle Tom's Cabin, Nov. 10; The Streets
 of New York, Nov. 12; Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, Nov. 13.
 Van Buren, Nov. 15.
 Fort Smith, Nov. 16-22: Ticket of Leave Man, Nov. 16.

May Wheeler.

Fayetteville, Nov. 21-22 (?): Engaged, Nov. 21.

1883

Fay Templeton Opera Troupe.

Fort Smith, Feb. 16-17: Mascotte, Feb. 16; Olivette, Feb. 17.

The Forhan Comedy Company.

Fayetteville, Feb. 12-17: Kilrush, Feb. 12; Flirtation or Life at Long Branch, Feb. 13; Joshua Whitcomb, Feb. 14; Two Orphans, Feb. 15; Zizi, Feb. 16.

Fort Smith, Feb. 19-24: Kilrush, Feb. 19; Black Diamonds, Feb. 20; Zizi, Feb. 21 or 22; Swap, The Yankee and Nan, The Good For Nothing, Feb. 23; Black Diamonds, (matinee) Feb. 24; The Two Orphans, Feb. 24.

Van Buren, Feb. 26-28.

Dardanelle, Mar. 12-14.

Russellville, Mar. 15-17: Kilrush, Mar. 15.

Fayetteville, Mar. 22-25: Ticket of Leave Man, Mar. 22; Rip Van Winkle, Mar. 23.

John E. Ince Comedy Company.

Fort Smith, Mar. 2-3.

Dardanelle, Mar. 5-6.

The Mabel Norton Combination.

Russellville, Mar. 26: Queen's Evidence.

Dardanelle, Mar. 28-30.

Van Buren, c. Apr. 1.

Fort Smith, Apr. 5-11: Queen's Evidence, c. Apr. 7; Children of the Wilderness, Apr. 11.

Eunice Goodrich Combination.

Fayetteville, Oct. 8-9: American Born, Oct. 8; Wanted, A Husband, Oct. 9.

Fort Smith, Oct. 10-13.

St. Quinten Opera Company.

Dardanelle, Nov. 16-16: La Mascotte, Nov. 16; Chimes of Normandie, Nov. 17.

Van Buren, Nov. 19-20: Chimes of Normandy, Nov. 19.

Fort Smith, Nov. 22-24: La Mascotte, Nov. 22; Chimes of Normandie, Nov. 23; Iclanthe, Nov. 24.

Fayetteville, Nov. 26-27: La Mascotte, Nov. 26; Bells of Corneville, Nov. 27.

The Basye Standard Dramatic Company.

Fort Smith, Dec. 11-15: The Galley Slave, Dec. 11; Fanchon the Cricket, Dec. 12.

Van Buren, Dec. 17-18 (?).

1884

Lizzie Evans Dramatic Troupe.

Fort Smith, Jan. 19-20: Fogg's Ferry, Jan. 19; Dew Drop, Jan. 20.

Spott's Comedy Company.

Fort Smith, Mar. 24: Everybody's Friend.

Van Buren, Mar. 25: Everybody's Friend.

Charlotte Thompson Combination.

Fort Smith, May 19-20: Jane Eyre, May 19; East Lynne, May 20.

Streeper's Dramatic Company.

Dardanelle, c. Sept. 10.

Fort Smith, Sept. 15-18: The Ocean of Life, Sept. 15; The Phoenix, Sept. 16; Trodden Down or Under Two Flags, Sept. 17; The Marble Heart, Sept. 18.

Van Buren, Sept. 20.

Fayetteville, Sept. 21-23: The Ocean of Life, Sept. 21; Trodden Down or Under Two Flags, Sept. 22; The Streets of New York, Sept. 23.

Rogers, Sept. 24-25.

Bentonville, Sept. 26 +.

The Graves and Kempton Chicago Comedy Company.

Van Buren, Oct. 13: Van, the Virginian.

Fort Smith, Oct. 14-18: Van, the Virginian, Oct. 14; Banker's Daughter, Oct. 15; Queen's Evidence, Oct. 16; Col. Mulberry Sellers, Oct. 17; Joshua Whitcomb, Oct. 18.

Russellville, Oct. 23: Van, the Virginian.

Mabel Norton Combination.

Van Buren, Nov. 15: Under the Gaslight.

Fayetteville, Nov. 16-18: Under the Gaslight, Nov. 16; Lord Dunderary, Nov. 17; The Phoenix, Nov. 18.

Van Buren, Nov. 24-26.

Richardson's Dramatic Combination.

Van Buren, Nov. 10-14 (?).

Maude Atkinson Theatrical Combination.

Fort Smith, Dec. 20-27: Lady of Lyons, Dec. 20; Queen's Evidence, Dec. 23; Hazel Kirke, Dec. 24; The Two Orphans, Dec. 27.

1885

Lizzie Evans Company.

Van Buren, Feb. 2: Fogg's Ferry.

Fort Smith, Feb. 3-4: Fogg's Ferry, Feb. 3; Dew Drop, (matinee)
Feb. 4; Maud Muller, Feb. 4.

Flora Moore.

Fort Smith, Feb. 20: A Bunch of Keys.

Frederick Warde.

Van Buren, Feb. 21: Virginius.

Fort Smith, Feb. 23-25: Richard III, Feb. 23; Richelieu, Feb. 24;
Othello, Feb. 25.

Max Thomas Opera Company.

Fort Smith, Sept. 2.

The Clifford Dramatic Company.

Fort Smith, Oct. 12-27: Davy Crockett, n.d.

Van Buren, Oct. 19-21: Monte Cristo, Oct. 19.

The Jennie Holman Combination.

Fayetteville, Oct. 19-24: Fanchon, The Cricket, Oct. 19; Hazel Kirke, Oct. 20; The Planter's Wife, Oct. 21; The Octoroon, Oct. 22; Banker's Daughter, Oct. 23; Ten Nights in a Bar Room, Oct. 24.

Robert McWade.

Fayetteville, Nov. 4: Rip Van Winkle.

Only a Woman's Heart Combination.

Fayetteville, Nov. 25 (?).

1886

Peck's Bad Boy Company.

Fayetteville, Jan. 11.

Van Buren, Jan 12 (?).

Eunice Goodrich Combination.

Fort Smith, Oct. 11-16.

Van Buren, Oct. 17.

Jennie Holman Theatrical Combination.

Fort Smith, week of Nov. 1.

Standard Uncle Tom's Cabin Company.

Russellville, Dec. 21.

1887

Sisson and Cawthorn's Little Nuggett Comedy Company.

Van Buren, Jan. 4.

Frederick Warde.Fort Smith, Feb. 17-19: Richelieu, n. d."Only a Farmer's Daughter" Company.

Russellville, Mar. 18.

Van Buren, Mar. 22.

Lizzie Evans.Fort Smith, Oct. 10-12: Our Angel, Oct. 10."Two Old Cronies."

Fayetteville, Oct. 13.

Miss Florine Arnold.Fort Smith, c. Oct. 15: Machael Strogoff.Martin Hayden.Fayetteville, Oct. 18 (?): A Boy Hero.Charles L. Anderson's Minuet Carnival Company.Fayetteville, Oct. 28: Machael Strogoff.Katie Putnam.Fayetteville, Nov. 11: Erma, The Elf.Ezra F. Kendall.Fayetteville, Nov. 25: A Pair of Kids.Jennie Holman Theatrical Combination.

Fort Smith, Dec. 5-10.

Fayetteville, Dec. 12-17: Divorce, Dec. 12.Louis James and Marie Wainright.Fort Smith, Dec. 12: Hamlet.Miss Margaret Mather.Fort Smith, Dec. 15: Romeo and Juliet.Cora Van Tassill.Fort Smith, Dec. 17: The Hidden Hand.Fisher and Hassan's Company.Fort Smith, c. Dec. 20: A Cold Day.Fayetteville, Dec. 20: A Cold Day.

Rusco and Swift's Standard "Uncle Tom's Cabin" Company.

Fayetteville, Dec. 22.

Fort Smith, Dec. 23.

Charles L. Davis.Fort Smith, Dec. 27: Alvin Joslyn.Emma Abbott.

Fort Smith, Dec. 30-31.

1888

Kate Bensburg Opera Company.

Fort Smith, c. Jan. 15.

Fayetteville, Jan. 20: The Sleeping Queen.Benjamin Maginley.Fort Smith, Jan. 26: Inshavogue.Fayetteville, Jan. 27: Inshavogue.F. C. Bangs.Fayetteville, Jan. 31: Francesca Da Rimini.Alfred F. Miaco.Fayetteville, Feb. 14: The Magic Talisman.Fort Smith, Feb. 15: The Magic Talisman.Seymour's Theatre Company.

Dardanelle, Feb. 14-16.

Van Buren, Feb. 27-30: Inshavogue, Feb. 27.Roland Reed.Fort Smith, Feb. 18: Humbug.Pete Baker.Fayetteville, Feb. 24: Cris and Lena.M'lle Rhea.Fayetteville, Mar. 5: Frou Frou.Casino Theatre Comedy Company.Fayetteville, Mar. 9: Busted.Patti Rosa.Fort Smith, Mar. 19-20: Love and Duty, Mar. 19; Imp, Mar. 20.Fayetteville, Mar. 21: Bob.Frederick Warde.Fort Smith, Mar. 26-27: Galba, The Gladiator, Mar. 26; Virginus,
Mar. 27.Fayetteville, Mar. 28: Virginus.

James O'Neill.

Fort Smith, Mar. 28: The Count of Monte Cristo.

Joseph Jefferson.

Fort Smith, Apr. 23.

Kate Putnam.

Fort Smith, Apr. 30-May 1.

Fayetteville, May 7: Lena, The Madcap.

Templeton Comic Opera Company.

Fort Smith, Week of June 4: Ermine, Girofle-Girofla, and Mascotte, n.d.

Fayetteville, June 8-9: Mikado, June 8; Hermine, (matinee) June 9; Olivette, June 9.

Eunice Goodrich.

Fayetteville, Sept. 10-11: Dad's Boy, Sept. 10; Wanted, A Husband, Sept. 11.

The Golden Troupe.

Fort Smith, Oct. 8-11: The Martyr, Oct. 8; The Little Dutchess, Oct. 9; The Gilded Age, Oct. 10; Katti, The Family Help, Oct. 11.

Billy Bryant.

Fayetteville, Oct. 9: Keep it Dark.

Fowler and Warmington's Theatre Company.

Fayetteville, Oct. 16: Skipped by the Light of the Moon.

Fort Smith, Oct. 17: Skipped by the Light of the Moon.

Lizzie Evans.

Fayetteville, Oct. 18: The Buckeye.

Fort Smith, Oct. 19-20: The Buckeye, Oct. 19; Our Angel, Oct. 20.

Nellie McHenry.

Fort Smith, Oct. 24: Three of a Kind.

Tutein.

Fort Smith, Oct. 30: Struck Gas.

Jane Coombs.

Fort Smith, Nov. 6: Bleak House.

Frank M. Wills.

Fayetteville, Nov. 8: Two Old Cronies.

Fort Smith, Nov. 9: Two Old Cronies.

Thomas W. Keene.

Fort Smith, Nov. 14-15: Richard III, Nov. 14; Julius Caesar,
Nov. 15.

Newton Beers.

Fort Smith, Nov. 19: Lost in London.
Fayetteville, Nov. 20: Lost in London.

Frank Jones.

Van Buren, Nov. 20: Si Perkins From Pugtown.
Fort Smith, Nov. 21: Si Perkins From Pugtown.

"A Night Off."

Fayetteville, Nov. 28.
Fort Smith, Nov. 29.

Pete Baker.

Fort Smith, Dec. 1: The Emigrant.

"Only a Country Girl."

Fort Smith, Dec. 5.

Marie Prescott and R. D. McLean.

Fort Smith, Dec. 7-8: Merchant of Venice, Dec. 7; Ingomar,
(matinee) Dec. 8; As You Like It, Dec. 8.

Mr. and Mrs. Florence.

Fort Smith, Dec. 12-13: Our Governor, Dec. 12; Mighty Dollar,
Dec. 13.

Jules Grau's Comic Opera Company.

Fort Smith, Dec. 17-19: Black Hussar, Dec. 17; Queen's Lace
Handkerchief, Dec. 18; Erminie, Dec. 19.

"Alone in London."

Fort Smith, Dec. 20.

Aiden Benedict.

Fayetteville, Dec. 20: Monte Cristo.
Fort Smith, Dec. 21: Monte Cristo.

"Lights and Shadows."

Fort Smith, Dec. 22.

George T. and Lizzie Ulmer.

Fort Smith, Dec. 24-25: For Congress, Dec. 24; Col. Mulberry Sellers,
Dec. 25.

1889

"A Cold Day" Company.Fayetteville, Jan. 5: A Cold Day.Fort Smith, Jan. 7: A Cold Day.Boston Ideal "Uncle Tom's Cabin" Company.

Fort Smith, Jan. 12.

Russellville, Jan. 23.

Miss Lillian Lewis.Fort Smith, Jan. 14-15: L'Article 47, Jan. 14; As In a Looking Glass, Jan. 15.Fayetteville, Jan. 16-17: As In a Looking Glass, Jan. 16; Article 47, Jan. 17.Fort Smith, Jan. 19: Dona Sol.Effie Ellsler.Fort Smith, Jan. 22: Judge Not.Phosa McAllister.Fort Smith, Jan. 23: Theodora.Fayetteville, Jan. 24: Theodora.Madame Janauschek.Fort Smith, Feb. 1-2: Meg Merrilies, Feb. 1; Macbeth, Feb. 2.Creston Clarke.Fort Smith, Feb. 4: Fool's Revenge.Fayetteville, Feb. 5: Hamlet.J. Z. Little.Fort Smith, Feb. 5: The World.Spenser's "Little Tycoon" Company.Fort Smith, Feb. 11; Little Tycoon.Alfred F. Miaco.Van Buren, Feb. 12 (?): The Magic Talisman.Fort Smith, Feb. 13: The Magic Talisman.

Fayetteville, c. Feb. 14 (?).

William McCready.Fort Smith, Feb. 15: The Black Flag.Van Buren, Feb. 18: The Black Flag."Siberia."

Fort Smith, Feb. 27.

Ezra F. Kendall.

Fort Smith, March 1: A Pair of Kids.

John Wild.

Fayetteville, Mar. 1: Running Wild.

Fort Smith, Mar. 2: Running Wild.

Van Buren, Mar. 4: Running Wild.

Clara Morris.

Fort Smith, Mar. 8: Renee De Moray.

"Shadows of a Great City."

Fort Smith, Mar. 18.

J. C. Stewart.

Fort Smith, Mar. 21: Two Johns.

Belle Emerson.

Fayetteville, Mar. 21: Fun in a Parlor.

"Storm Beaten."

Fort Smith, Mar. 25 (?).

Joseph Jefferson.

Fort Smith, Apr. 25-26: Cricket on the Hearth, Apr. 25; Lend Me Five Shillings, Apr. 26.

Clara Louise Kellogg.

Fort Smith, May 2 (?).

Nellie Walters.

Van Buren, May 4: Criss Cross.

Fayetteville, May 8: Criss Cross.

The Jennie Holman Combination.

Fort Smith, Week of May 13.

J. B. Hogan and Mabel Norton.

Van Buren, Sept. 24: The World.

Criterion Dramatic Company.

Fort Smith, Week of Oct. 7: Chick, n.d.

Marie Prescott and Robert McLean.

Fayetteville, Oct. 29: The Merchant of Venice.

Thomas Keene.

Fort Smith, Nov. 18: Richelieu.

"Last Days of Pompei."

Fayetteville, Nov. 29 (?).

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Harold Calvin Tedford was born September 7, 1933, at Clarksville, Arkansas. He had his elementary and secondary education in Arkansas public schools at Bentonville, Marion, and Corning, and was graduated from Arkadelphia High School in 1950. In 1954 he received the B degree from Ouachita College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas. After serving for two years as an officer in the United States Army, he entered the University of Arkansas. He completed his course work for the Master of Arts degree in the summer of 1957 and received the degree in 1958. He entered the Graduate School at Louisiana State University in September, 1957 and completed his course work by January 1960. In September, 1960, he joined the faculty of Southwest Texas State College, San Marcos, Texas, where he served as instructor in Speech and Theatre. He was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1962. He is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University in August, 1965. In the fall of 1965 he will assume duties as assistant professor of Speech and Theatre at Wake Forest College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

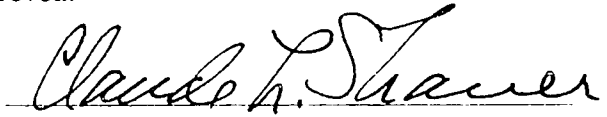
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Harold Calvin Tedford

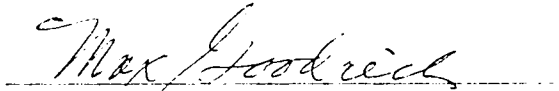
Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: A Study of Theatrical Entertainments in Northwest Arkansas
From Their Beginning Through 1889.

Approved:

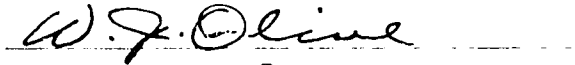


Major Professor and Chairman

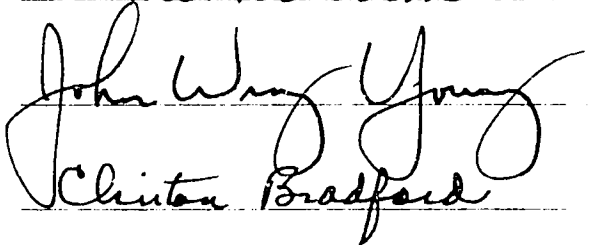


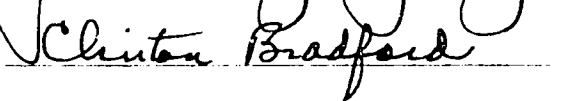
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:









Date of Examination:

July 19, 1965